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COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

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COMPATIBLE Windows 95 COMPATIBLE

KIDS TO ADULTS T K-A CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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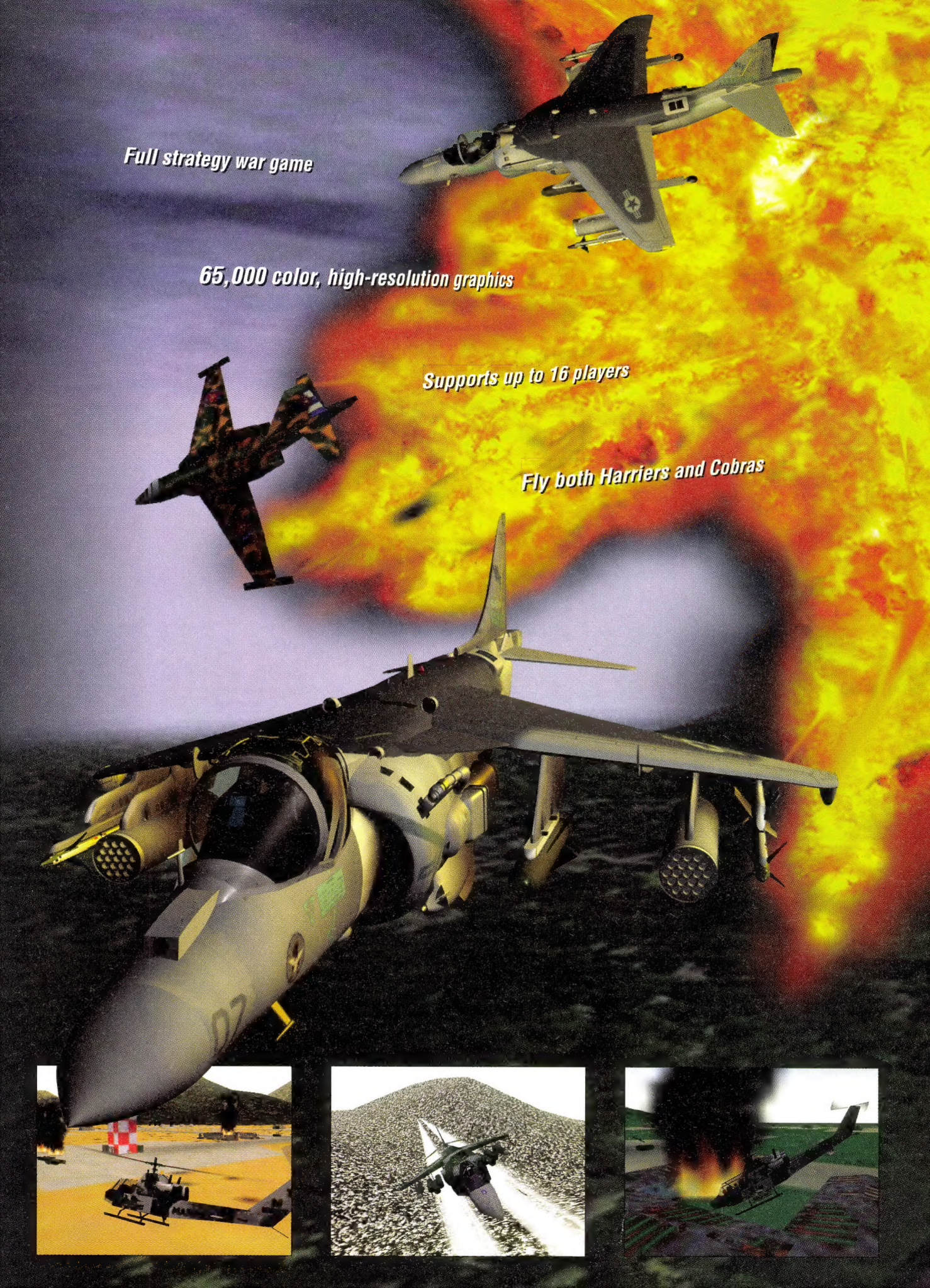
Full strategy war game
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Fly both Harriers and Cobras

EXPLOSIVE BREAKTHROUGH IN FLIGHT SIMS.

Flying Nightmares 2

It's challenging enough to create a realistic air battle. But when your intent is to create a full-scale, immersive war experience, you need an element of strategy as well. For this reason, Eidos developed Commandant™, a real-time strategy engine designed specifically for integration into flight sims. Commandant™ increases the level of immersion and challenge for the intelligent gamer.

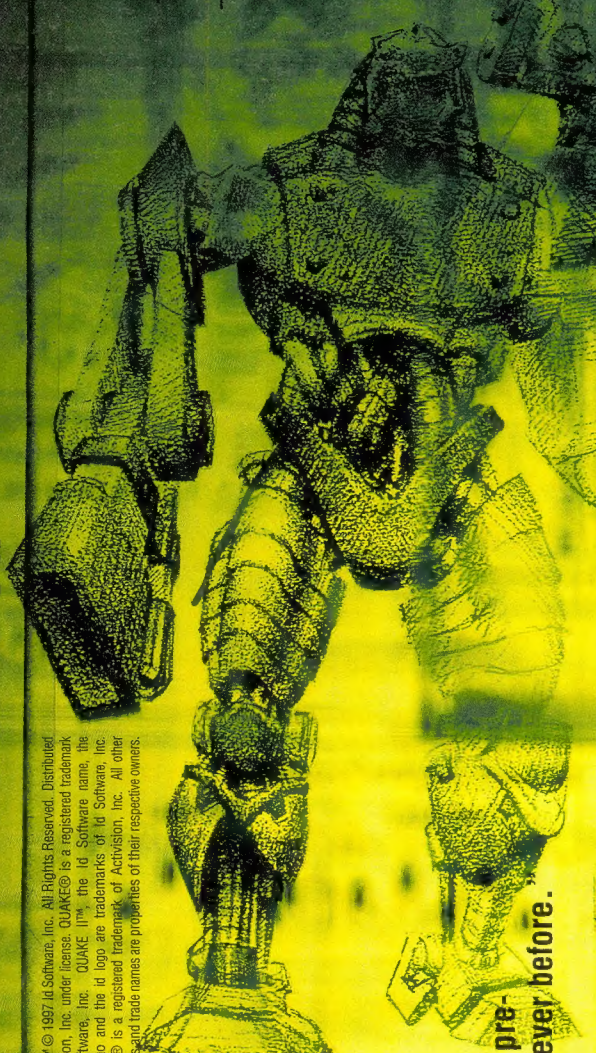
Adding to FN2's sense of immersion is the most sophisticated multi-player technology ever seen in a flight sim. It allows for unprecedented levels of communication and coordination between players. You'll be in air battles with up to 16 flight jocks while freeing your troops from danger below. The end result? An immersive war experience sure to blow you away.

www.fn2.com

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

You've been warned.

19:42 You learn the hard way in the outer sector... Like never get into a drinking match with a three-headed Bukan. Never assume a Strogg is dead even when he's nothing but bloody scraps of shrapnel. And never go to bed with a Rabaul no matter how many breasts she has.



19:11

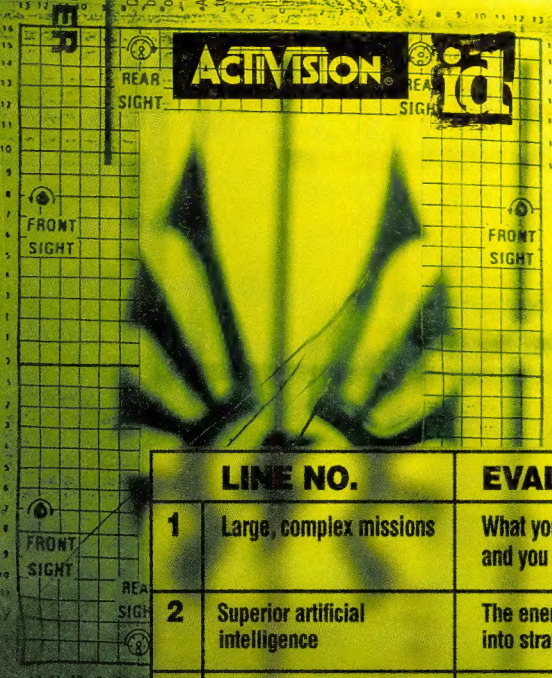
THE LINE BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ERASED.

Blood vessels and wires should never have been crossed. Souls and circuitry, brain stems and processors.

"Quake II will establish id as the pre-eminent blastmasters more than ever before."
—PC Gamer

www.idsoftware.com

	LINE NO.	EVALUATION
1	Large, complex missions	What you do in one level could affect another. One false move and you could alert security, flood a passageway, or worse.
2	Superior artificial intelligence	The enemy is far from stupid. They will evade attacks, maneuver into strategic attack locations, and hunt your ass down.
3	Intense environments	Man gun turrets. Blow up subways. Smash glass. Toss grenades with perfect control. Duck to evade hits. Give them Hell.



5. MARINE CORPS TARGET

U.S. MARINE CORPS 25-METER ZEROING PROCEDURES

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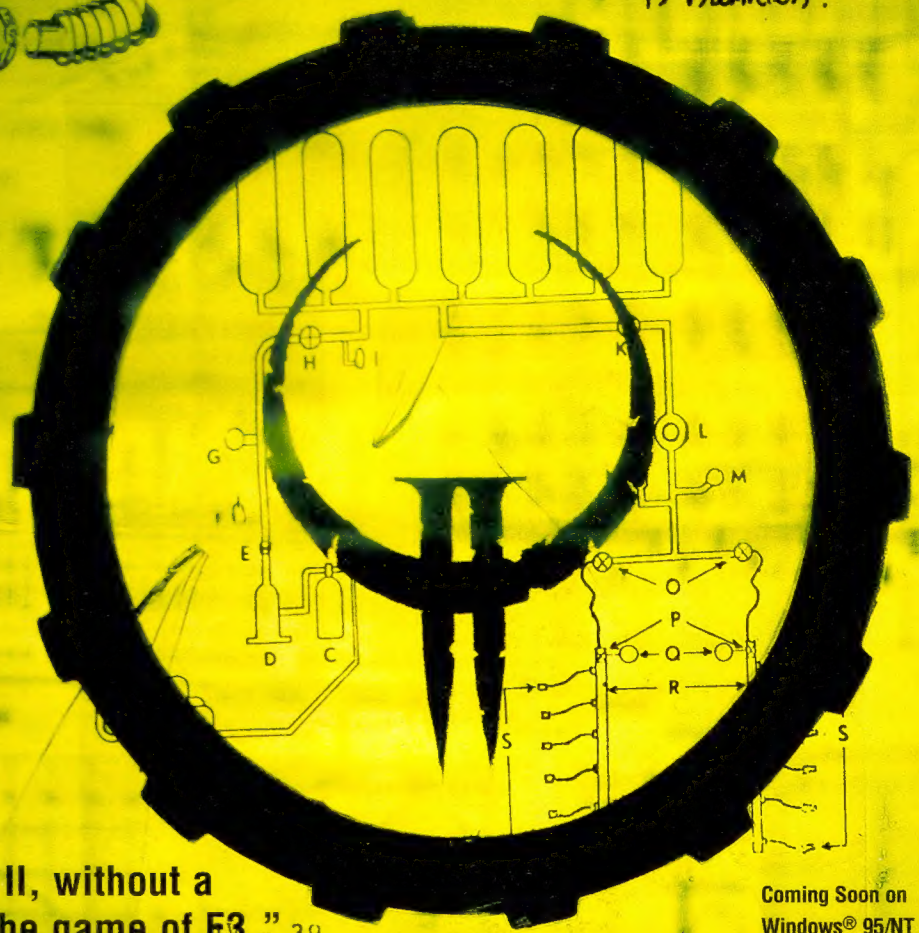
08:03 Grotesque images of Strogg have been filling my sleep at night. Their metallic spines jutting awkwardly through muscle, skin and connective tissue, masks of human facial skin smeared and bonded to their cyber-alloy heads, crude but powerful weapons jammed into oozing, gaping sockets. Thank God the endless sleep ahead is dreamless.

17:05 It's either us or them this time. We lose, and we all end up beaten out on the grill of some unholy mechanized carnivore. We win, and the human Coalition of Man can start rebuilding the cities on Mars, Olympus, even Earth. Who knows - they might even get the old interplanetary football league going again. God, I miss Monday Night Football.



"Quake II, without a doubt, the game of E3." 39
— Computer Gaming World

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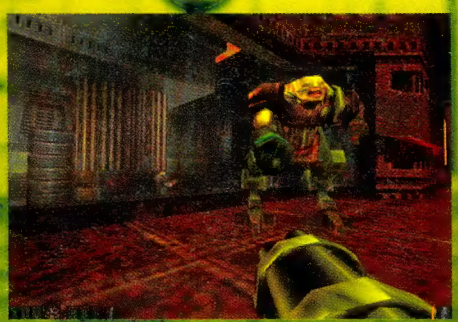
QUAKE II™



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BLADE RUNNER

RIVEN

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

review ratings

Classic ★★★★★
Excellent ★★★★☆
Good ★★★☆☆
Fair ★★☆☆☆
Why? ★☆☆☆☆

All ratings are assigned by the author of the article.
The "Stamp of Approval" is awarded by the editors of the magazine.

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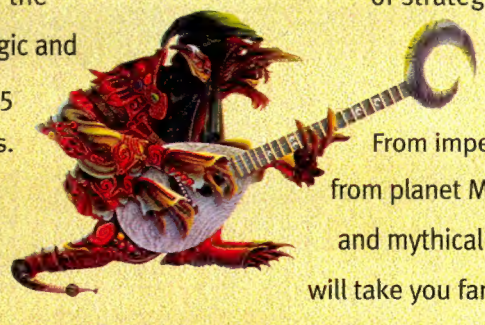

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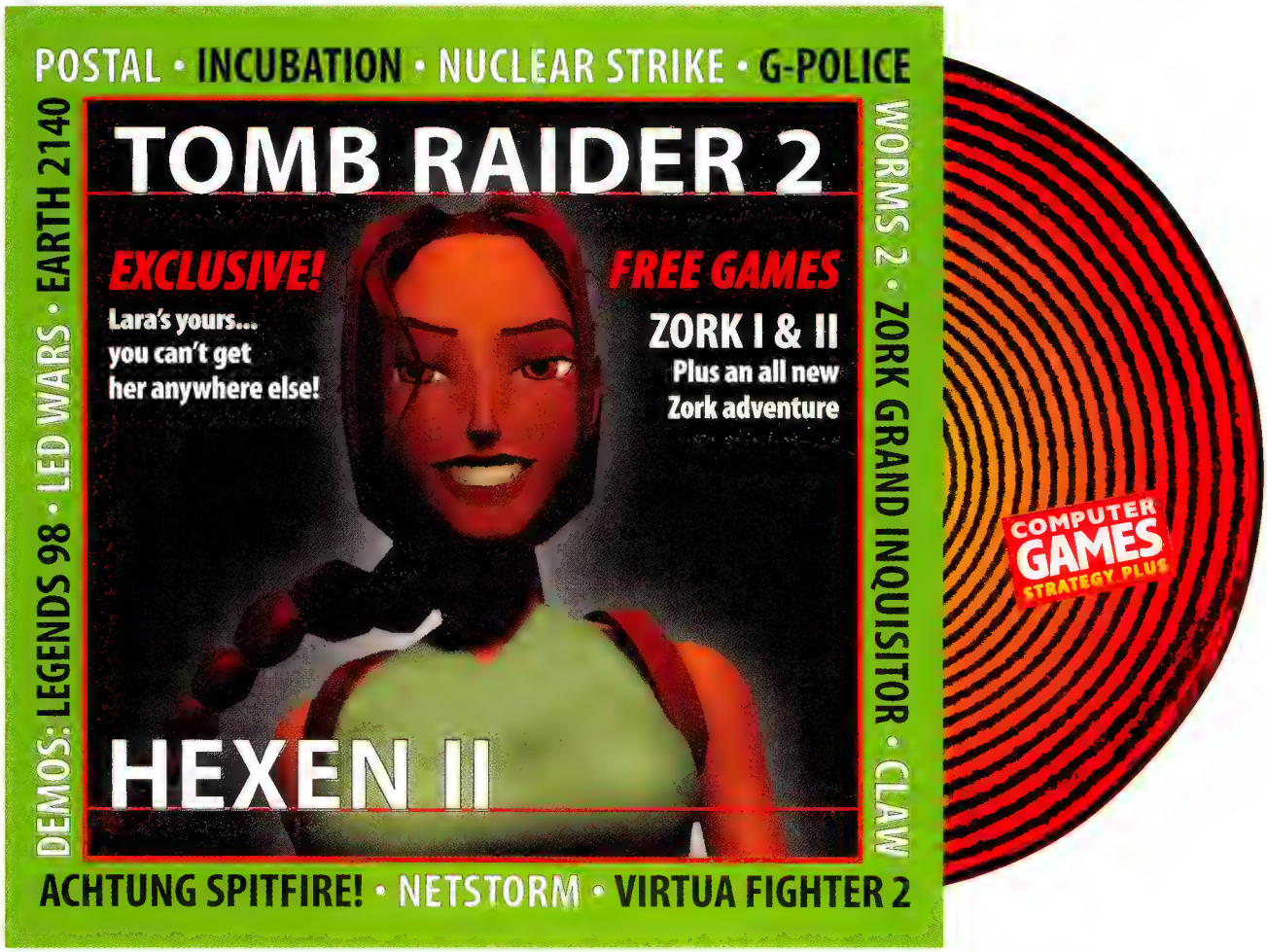
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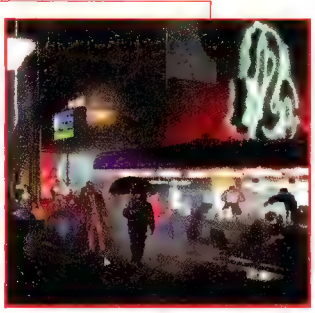

Red Baron II

EarthSiege 3
Armed & Delirious

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Windows 3.1

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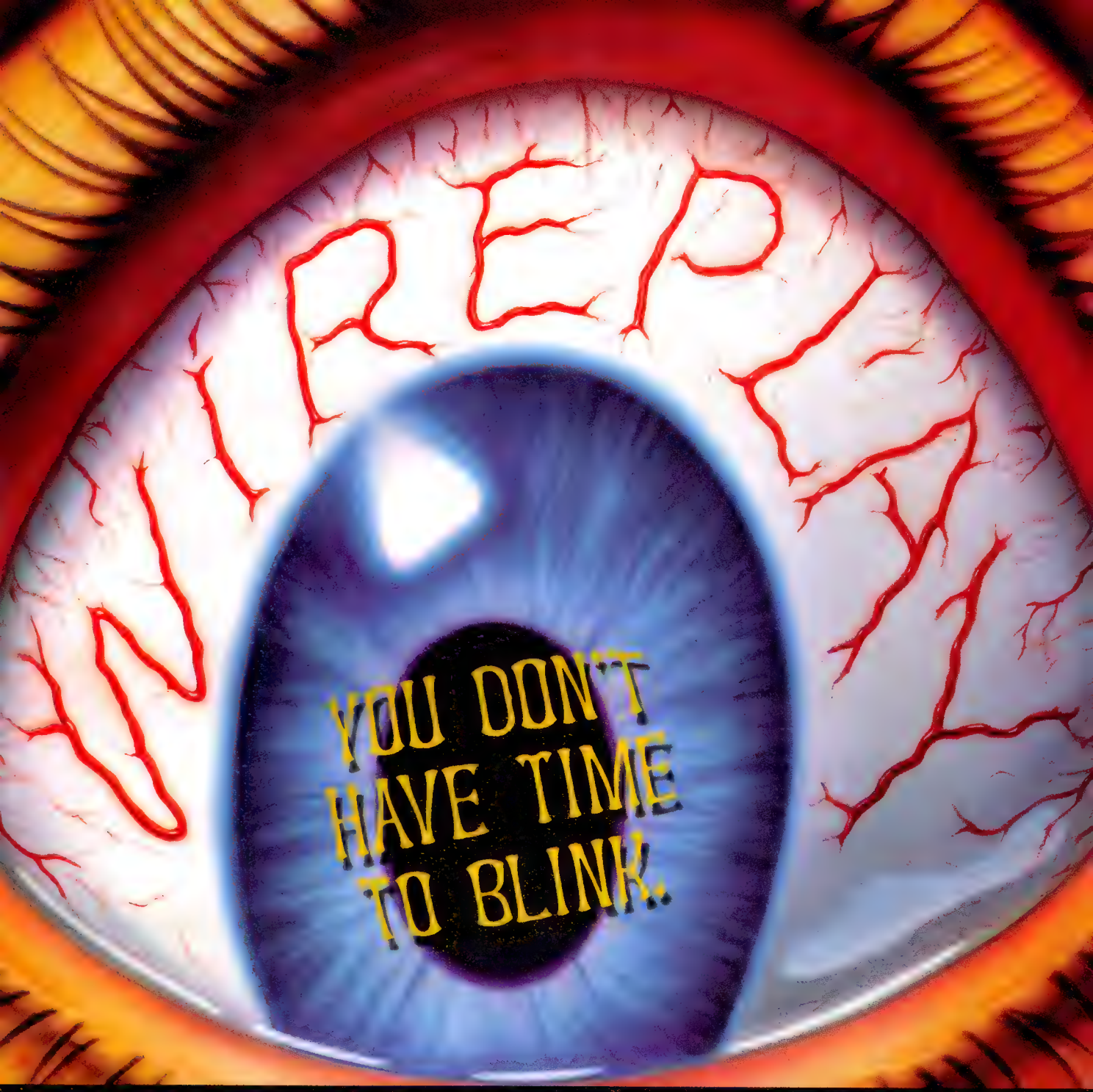

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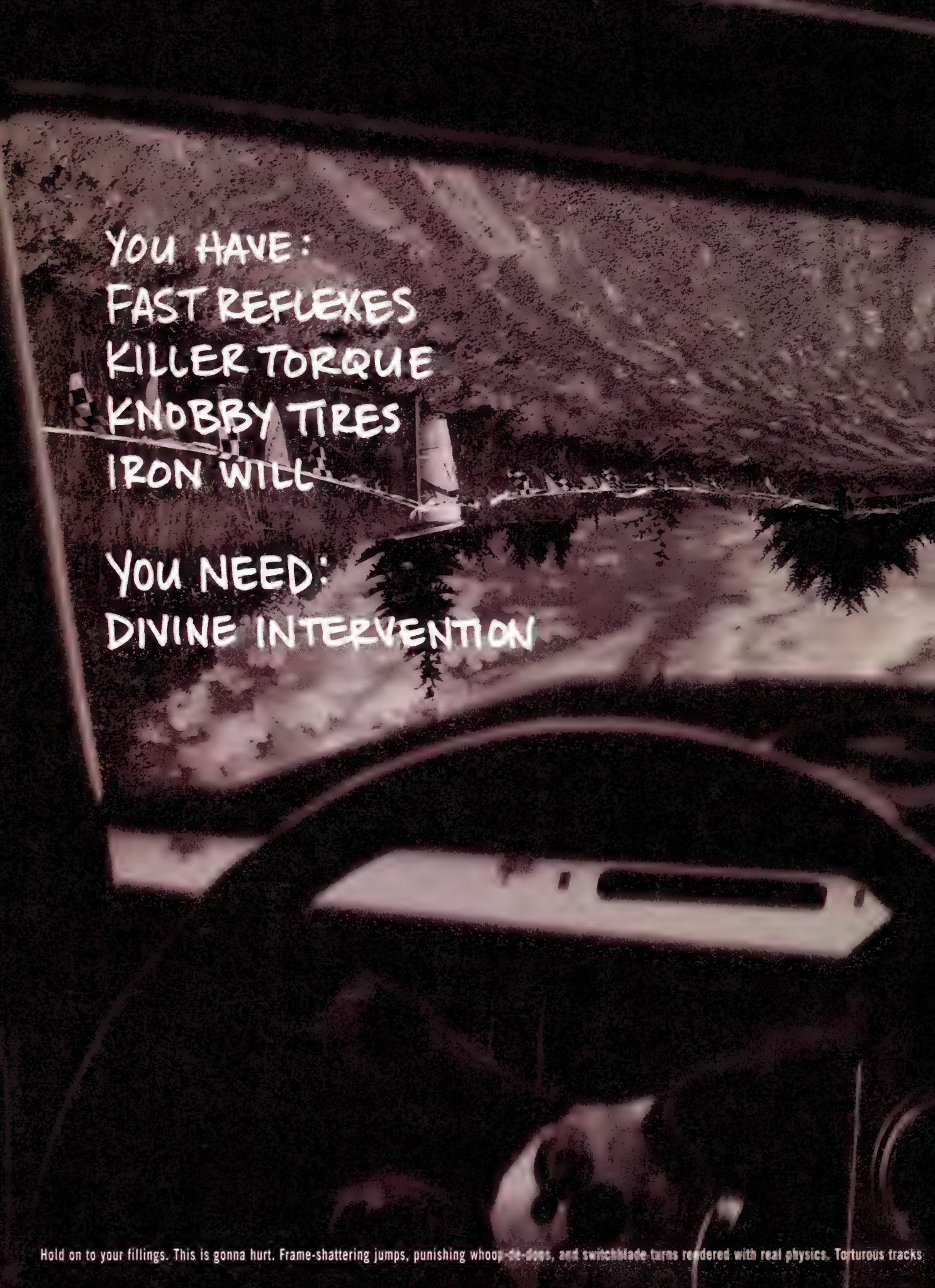

Hold on to your fillings. This is gonna hurt. Frame-shattering jumps, punishing whoop-de-doos, and switchblade turns rendered with real physics. Torturous tracks

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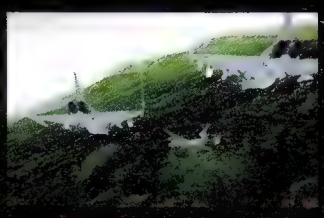

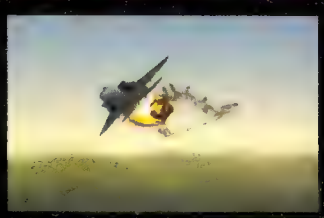

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EF2000 V2.0. It's not a sequel, it's reality.

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The Clone Wars™

A long time ago, in an industry far, far away…

…a small group of rebels sat in a dark, dingy room formulating an idea that would revolutionize the computer gaming industry. It was a game, but not just any game – it was like nothing else on the market, featuring a unique premise, revolutionary gameplay and a look and feel that …

And some guy in marketing said it wouldn't sell, so it was canceled.

In its place, The Very Big Company is releasing *The Clone Wars*™, a real-time 3D *Myst*-style action-oriented strategic simulation taking place in a futuristic fantasy world not far removed from our own. With 3D graphics, polygonal units, a programmable neural net AI, advanced unit controls, 32-bit color, lens flares, multi-colored lighting effects, voxels, 3D THX sound, voice recognition, native support for every known 3D accelerator, and 39 minutes of full-motion video featuring Ewan McGregor, Cameron Diaz and Bruce Willis, it should be on every gamer's shopping list this upcoming holiday season.

Or maybe not.

While *The Clone Wars*™ may not be appearing on a PC near you at any time soon, this issue launches our first installment of the war of the clones. In this issue, you'll find reviews of *Dark Reign*, *Age of Empires*, *Total Annihilation*, *Outpost 2*, *War Inc.*, *Conquest Earth*, *7th Legion*, *Riven: The Sequel to Myst*, *Jedi Knight*, and *Star Trek Star Fleet Academy*. While all of these games, for the most part, differ from one another, they all share one thing – they're considered clones of other popular products.

Every one of these games may tout particular innovations in their genre, but if they don't jump right out and bite you on the booty, how many people will play them long enough to properly discover their subtleties? Many of us, ourselves included, are often too quick to dismiss a product that's competing in an "established genre." (Marketing speak for "our game's a clone.") At the same time, we're too quick to support a product that offers a number of "features" that sound wonderful on paper, ignoring the possibility that a well-executed but derivative game is superior to an original or advanced game that's unplayable.

However, whenever someone in the industry shows us a new game, we get the exact same spiel: "Our [blank] is like [blank], only we take it a few steps further. We've taken the best features of [blank] and merged them with the best of [blank]" and so on. As we sit there with our [blank] stares, it's hard not to feel sorry for our unfortunate presenters. We'd love to get excited, but we can't. Been there, done that. We know you love your game, and your game may be the best thing since sliced bread, but we also know that there are few companies in this industry that are willing to take the risk of doing a game that doesn't follow a certain formula.

Is this a bad thing? Not necessarily. Everyone, in particular the press, makes too big a deal about copycat designs. Those who think the glut of real-time strategy games is unprecedented has forgotten the glut of *Myst*, *Doom* and *Civilization* clones of 1993-1995, the *Wing Commander* clones of 1991-1993, the *SimCity* clones of 1990-1992… and so on. The basic formula most publishers use is to look at the top 10 and make next year's games just like them. Using that formula, we can expect 1998 to feature *Diablo* clones, *Barbie Fashion Designer* clones and "large-breasted female third-person 3D action game" clones.

But all is not lost. The "next big thing" will still be created by those rebels mentioned above. Right now, they're sitting in their cubicle waiting for the day someone will fund their "crazy" vision. They'll continue to work on that clone product their publisher is forcing them to do, confident that one day they'll have enough money and *chutzpah* to break away from the pack and follow their muse.

Until that day, send in the clones. They may look the same, they may play the same. But we all know the inevitable truth – we'll never love them as much as we love the original.

One final note: I was remiss last month in not welcoming our two new editorial staff members, Robert Mayer and Jason Ocampo. Bob, whose name you'll probably recognize from his years spent grumbling about war and strategy games, handles all things online, from administering the editorial on our web site (www.cdmag.com) to making sure we have a few magazine articles on Kali every month (a joke). He's from the Georgia and actually refers to the people of Vermont as "Yankees."

Jason is our online news editor, and will eventually take over the action section of the magazine (as soon as he can pry it out of my grubby hands). He's really young and green, which means we make him do all of the work no one else wants to do (two words: *Catfight II* review). He actually owns a Subaru, which really says it all.

We're expecting a lot from our new staff members. After all, we've cloned them from the DNA of some of the finest people in the industry.

–Steve Bauman, Editor

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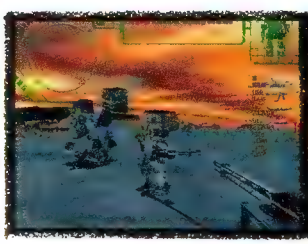

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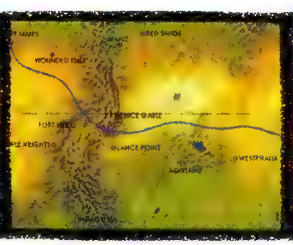
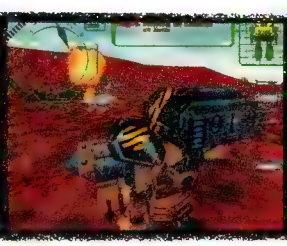


CREATE YOUR OWN CHARACTER, AND PLAY VIA LAN/INTERNET AS WINS AND CASUALTIES IMPACT THE FRONT LINES ON A PERSISTENT ONLINE BATTLE-MAP.



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An American demon in London

Blizzard unleashes Diablo II while LucasArts gets Grim at ECTS 97

LONDON—A PAIR OF AMERICAN COMPANIES UPSTAGED THEIR hosts at ECTS 97. Europe's biggest computer trade show, ECTS 97 was considerably larger than ECTS 96 (though still not as big as the Electronic Entertainment Expo), which isn't surprising when you consider Europe's expanding share of this global industry. According to the show's statistics, Europe will account for $4.4 billion of the global electronic games industry, which they estimate at $17 billion. They project a peak in the console market and a gradual increase in their share of the PC games industry—what was a $1 billion industry in 1996 will have grown to $2.5 billion by 2002.

The sketches on this page conceptual designs from Diablo II

While most of the titles shown were further-in-development builds of games first displayed at E3, there were a few all-new titles. LucasArts once again used an international audience to launch a new adventure game. Last year it was *Curse of Monkey Island*, this year's it's Tim Schafer's *Grim Fandango*. Set in a world inspired by both film noir and Mexican Folklore and set in and around the *Dia De Los Meuertos* ("Day of the Dead") festival, it's LucasArts first 3D rendered adventure game.

You control Manny Calavera, a travel agent in the Land of the Dead. As an employee of the Department of Death, it's his job to pick up the living and set them on their four-year journey across the underworld. Unable to be promoted until he makes his quota, he finds someone's been keeping him from getting the right clients. After stealing a prime prospect, in true noir fashion he sets in motion a chain of events that could threaten the destiny of his soul.

Where previous LucasArts games used cel-based animation with occasional 3D artwork, *Grim Fandango* uses all 3D rendered backgrounds and characters. The visual look of the game is a hodgepodge of styles, with the characters obviously influenced by Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas* and the hot-rods by Ed "Big Daddy" Roth (the man of a thousand pictures of bloodshot eyeballs protruding from cars).

They may be dead but they look fabulous in Grim Fandango

With Schafer's track record of wildly original games (*Day of the Tentacle*, *Full Throttle*), expect the unexpected with *Grim Fandango*.

Death makes a point in Grim Fandango

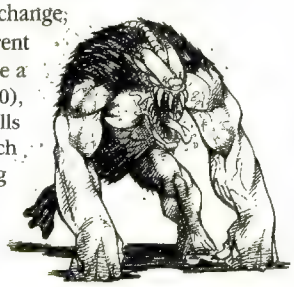
Overshadowing LucasArts' announcement was Blizzard's official announcement of *Diablo II*. A follow-up up to the best-selling game thus far of 1997, the big additions are five new character classes, expanded towns, multiple dungeons per town and increased multiplayer options.

Players who long for those dark and dingy dungeons will find a lot to like in the sequel, as there will now be multiple (random) dungeons and crypts per town. For those interested in getting some sun, there will be four towns from which to begin exploration, each with their own wilderness areas. According to Blizzard's Bill Roper, the latter feature is intended to, "Bring the *Diablo* experience outdoors."

The new character classes include three male and two female characters. Officially, Blizzard has only confirmed that there will be an Amazon fighter. Speculation on the Internet has centered on a Paladin, Monk, Cleric and a female Sorceress or Demon.

There will be a much larger and more involving plot, and each character will have the chance to attempt different quests. The plot finds Tristam in ruins after Diablo returns to the mortal realm. As hope for salvation from Diablo's wrath begins to fade, a new batch of heroes must be recruited to fight the bad guys and return him to Hell for good. Or at least until *Diablo III*.

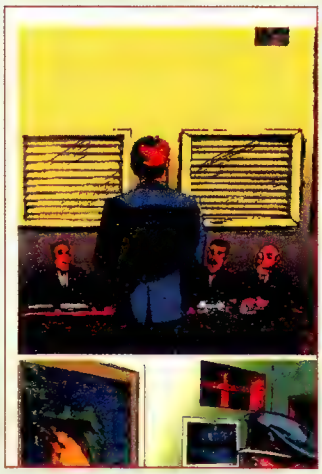
Depending on how you act throughout the game, i.e. not doing a quest, your relationship with an NPC may change; so certain aspects of the plot will be different from game-to-game. Of course there will be a number of new quests (more than 20), approximately 30 levels, monsters and spells to keep players busy. The artwork, which was so distinctive in the original, is being created this time by an entirely new team of artists.



While the team from Blizzard North

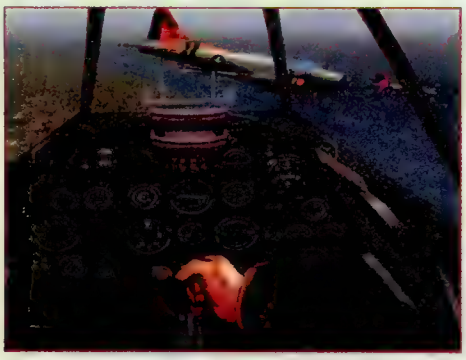
is trying to keep the game simple, they want to enhance the gameplay by forcing players to adopt new strategies for dealing with various monsters. Each class will have specific fighting techniques, and spells and skills at their disposal.

battle.net will be enhanced to help stem the tide of cheaters. Each user will get a unique ID, allowing the server to store profiles showing how often you kill other players. A ranking system will be in place, allowing someone to be crowned the King or Queen of *Diablo* and an online trading post will be opened. *Diablo II* will also support up to eight human players in one party. Unfortunately, you will not be able to import characters from *Diablo* into the sequel.



How will flight-sim grognards react to comic book mission briefings?

Psygnosis, which may be Europe's popular developer, unveiled a new flight simulator. Developed by a group of ex-DID (*EF2000*) employees now calling themselves General Simulations Ltd., *Wings of Destiny* is a World War II flight sim that allows you to fly for the Axis or the Allies. The campaigns, of which there are four (50 total missions), are story-based rather than dynamic and are represented graphically in an old comic-book style, which is oddly appealing.



The in-cockpit view from Wings of Destiny

The game will allow you to fly four different aircraft, the Messerschmidt 109 and 262, P51 Mustang and Spitfire. They're promising accurate force-based flight models that change with fuel loads and loadouts (when asked about the Mustang, they said yes, it will be difficult to get in the air). Each plane will have its own unique and free-scrolling cockpit developed from photographs of the actual planes (which is why they showed the game at London's Imperial War Museum—they had an actual Spitfire on display to compare their model to).

Wings of Destiny has 3D accelerated graphics and is using realistic terrain data for the simulation environment

The game will ship with native 3Dfx support via its Glide API and support 32-bit color (which isn't supported by the current 3D accelerators, though some 2D cards can do it). Multiplayer options include support for up to eight players over the usual DirectPlay protocols. There will be dogfights as well as squadron vs. squadron options. *Wings of Destiny* is scheduled for a March release.

In the "Battle of the Bimbos" contest, Eidos came in a close second with their incredibly busy booth. In addition to a Lara Croft look-alike model, they imported some silicone- and steroid-enhanced folks to shill for their *Fighting Force* game (console-only, though a PC version has been shown—it may be released only in Europe). But they came in second to the biggest display of the show, Virgin's "The Virg" booth, which raised the cheesiness factor of trade shows sky-high by having models walking around in see-through clothing. We'll be keeping a close eye on Eidos' booth next year to see how they respond to Virgin's challenge. *–Steve Bauman*

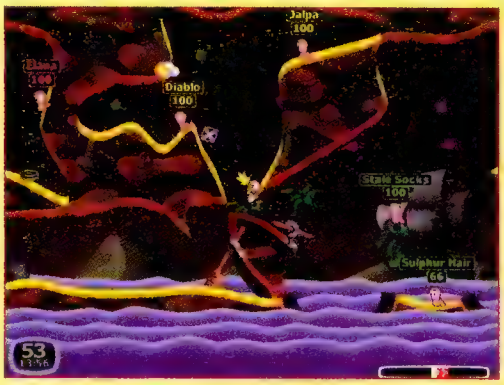
Meet the actual Lara Croft? Golly!

Worms 2

ECTS highlight–they ain't no fish bait

FIRST LOOK SURE, THEY MIGHT BE worms, but these fellas aren't the ones you see in the gutter after a rain or dangling from a fishhook…No sir! These guys are instead armed and very, very dangerous—at least to each other, and in a very cute way. In the spirit of *Lemmings*, this turn-based strategy game (a sequel to *Worms*, a game largely ignored in the U.S. but wildly popular in Europe) puts you in charge of a squad of crawlers armed to the, errr, teeth (?) as they battle other slime squads across a variety of fanciful landscapes. While turn-based, all is not peaceful contemplation as the turns are timed (length is adjustable); in a turn you must maneuver one of your worms into position, target, fire, and maybe hide (if you can)—just watch out where you're aiming and what you're shooting, because your fellow slime soldiers (or even your worm-of-the-moment) can be taken out as easily as the enemy.

The game features more than 60 weapons and, using a weapons editor, players can make new ones by combining weapon types. Likewise, the worms themselves can be modified via the Worms Speech Editor—with a sound card and a microphone you could make your team talk like former presidents or Charlie's Angels. The high-res art has been given a cartoon-y look, which fits in with the whimsical nature of the game; players can also customize levels via a "graffiti mode." Up to 18 players can play the game hotseat (that *would* be a hot seat, wouldn't it?), and up to eight via LAN or Internet (or head-to-head over a modem).



Blasting away at a worm named Diablo

To give you an idea of this game series' popularity in Europe, at the ECTS show in London, the *Worms 2* display was the most popular one in their booth; people crowded around the game while titles such as *MechCommander* and *Falcon 4* languished. North America will get a chance to see what all the fuss is about sometime this coming winter. *–Scott Udell*

Worms 2 • MicroProse • Windows 95

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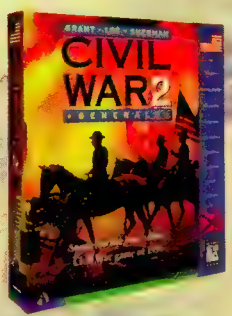

Impressions

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RESIDENT EVIL

Virgin INTERACTIVE

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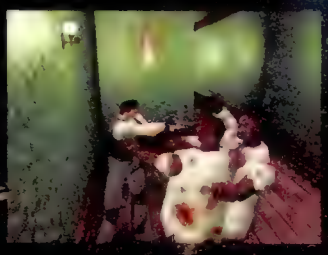

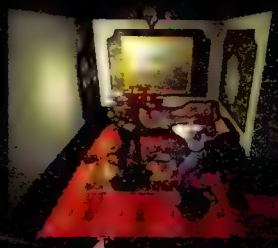

Arguably the best PlayStation game of all time is now available for the PC in its original, uncensored entirety. It's bloodier, more violent and contains all the gruesome, never-before-seen footage that was cut out of the console version. Part of you will want to uncover the grisly mysteries that dwell within. Part of you will wish you never set foot inside.

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Men in Black

Will, Tommy Lee and Linda camp on your PC

Who's the Fresh Prince now, punk?

FIRST LOOK THE MEN IN BLACK GAME license has been floating around for a long time. Well before the film was completed, well before anyone knew it would be a sellout powerhouse, Gigawatt Studios had fallen in love with the idea of a *Men in Black* gameworld. After a long, convoluted time of bouncing from plate to plate, the title finally ended up as a team effort of the developer Gigawatt, and The Design League, Gremlin and Sony, under the ultimate auspices of SouthPeak Interactive.

That's Mr. Jones to you, buddy

This is an action/adventure—big emphasis on the action. Displayed in high-resolution throughout, the over 200 backgrounds are pre-rendered, and 500-polygon, modeled characters are rendered in real-time. Once you complete an opening mission as the Will Smith movie character and become recruited as an agent of the Men in Black, you have the choice of playing the three remaining scenarios as any one of the main protagonists from the film: Cool and seasoned Agent K, a career Man in Black (played in the film by Tommy Lee Jones); savvy and street-wise Agent J, (played in the film by Will Smith), or Agent L, the former coroner who became the first MiB agent to require separate showers (played by Linda Fiorentino). The three combat styles are quite different, and a large arsenal will be available to all, in addition to the ol' punch 'n' kick implements.

An alien race is constructing a galaxy-scaled consciousness processor and is trying to turn the human race and its planet into one huge, organic macrochip. Their ultimate weapon turns out to be an Amazonian spore-bearing flower, which will mysteriously alter Jim and Spock until…er, which will neutralize human life into matter suitable for computer processing. Look for a late November release. *–Cindy Yans*

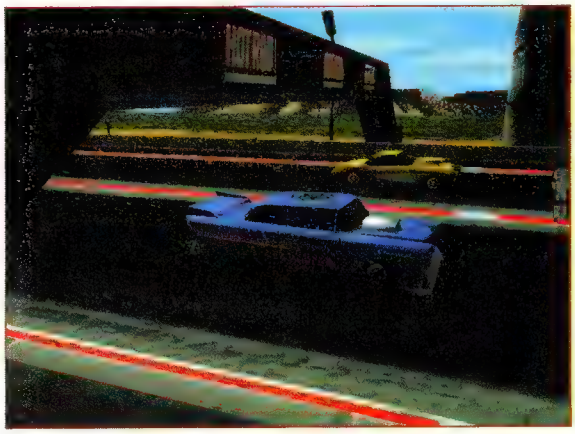
Men in Black • SouthPeak • Windows 95

The Men in Black HQ

BRIEFS: Big changes at MicroProse – Spectrum HoloByte has officially changed its company name to MicroProse, Inc. A few days later, **GT Interactive bought** the newly christened **MicroProse** in a cool **$250** million stock deal. Next up—3D Realms to develop ***Civilization 3D***, starring **Duke Nukem… 3Dfx sues Sega, NEC** – 3Dfx Interactive has filed a $210 million lawsuit against Sega Enterprises, Sega of America and NEC Corp. on charges of unfair competition, negligent misrepresentation, breach of contract, interference with contract and intentional misrepresentation. In response, Sega said it will "aggressively defend itself." In other 3Dfx news, due to complaints about perfor-

Burnout

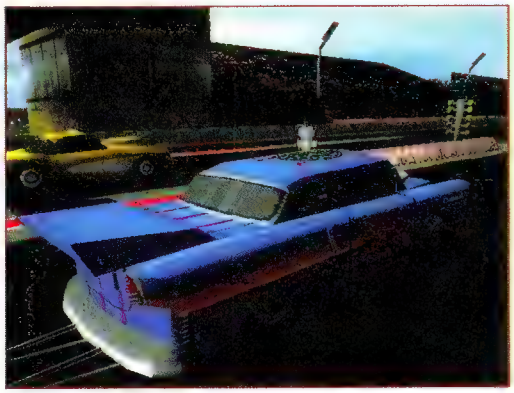
Bethesda makes a game in drag



All the racing with none of the smell

FIRST LOOK BETHESDA SOFTWORKS, creators of *XCar*, is teaming with *Hot Rod Magazine* to develop *Burnout: Championship Drag Racing*. Modeling the Sportsman Class of drag racing, *Burnout* is being developed as a simulation rather than an arcade game. It features what Bethesda claims is a "fully realistic, emptying and filling engine model" developed by a company called Motion Software, Inc.

The game will ship with 20 different cars ranging from classics to late-models. As with *XCar*, there will be plenty of components for you to tune, and you'll be able to import actual dynamometer data from Motion Software's *Desktop Dyno* software (for all of the gamers who own that product). Also included will be 20 tracks modeled for altitude, weather and lane attributes. Bethesda's Xngine supplies the 3D engine, meaning this game, like *XCar*, will support the 3Dfx card, and multiplayer will be supported over the Internet, LANs or modems.



You'll get multiple camera angles to view the action

Director of development Brent Erickson said in a prepared statement, "There hasn't been a drag racing game in almost 10 years, and racing enthusiasts have been clamoring for one. We want *Burnout* to establish the standard by which all drag racing sims are judged." He went on to say, "Gamers will love the brute power and sheer speed of drag racing. The hardcore racing sim fans will definitely appreciate the extents to which we've gone to produce a realistic simulation. Everyone will have a great time racing and building a career."

Burnout is scheduled for release in November at a price that, according to Bethesda, will "appeal to the masses." *–Steve Bauman*

Burnout: Championship Drag Racing • Bethesda • DOS

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Interplay

XATRIX

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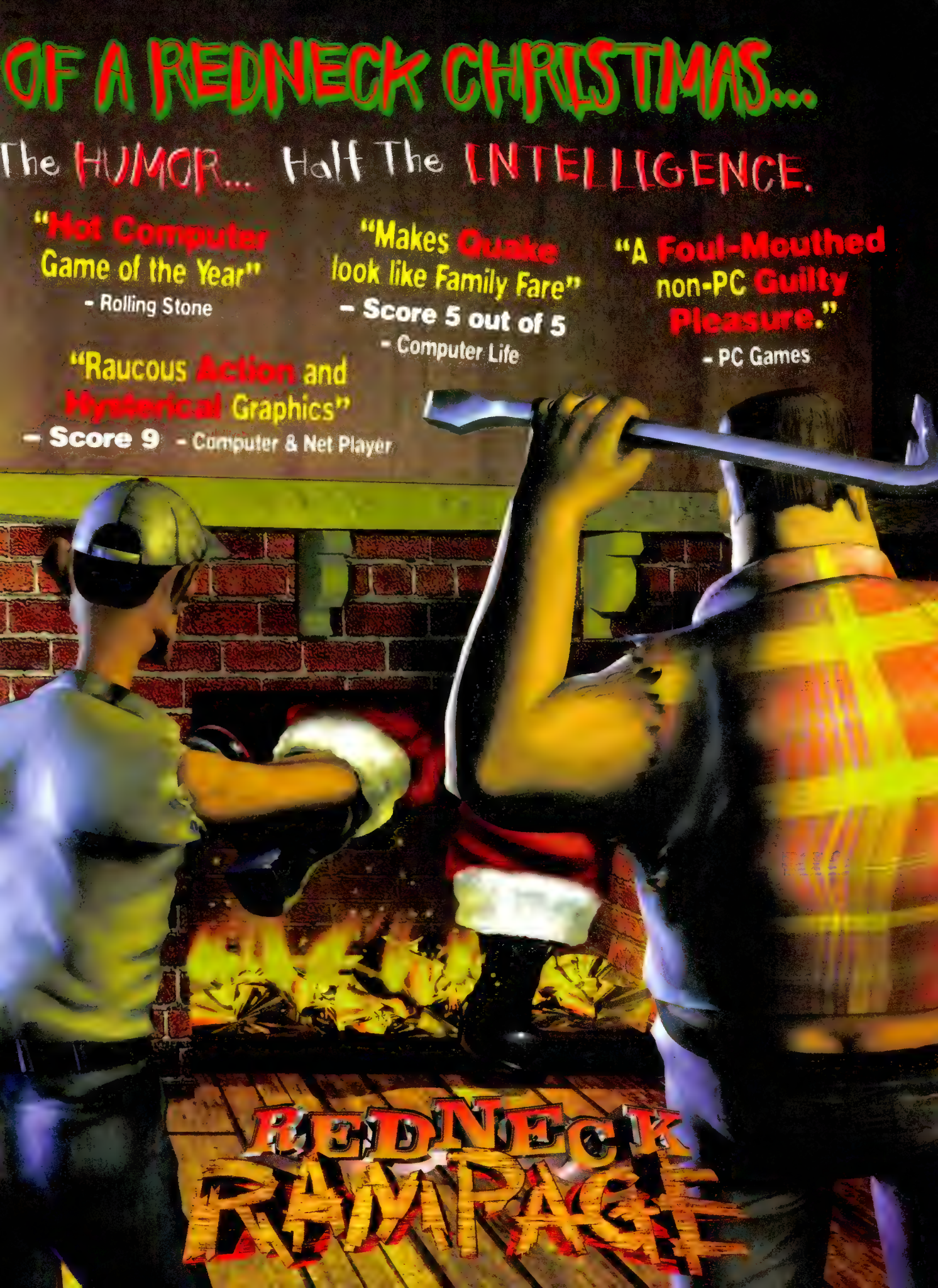
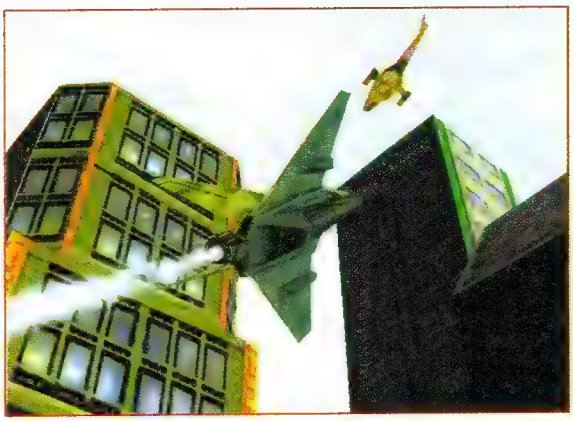

OF A REDNECK CHRISTMAS...
The HUMOR... Half The INTELLIGENCE.
"Hot Computer Game of the Year"
- Rolling Stone
"Makes Quake look like Family Fare"
– Score 5 out of 5
- Computer Life
"A Foul-Mouthed non-PC Guilty Pleasure."
- PC Games
"Raucous Action and Hysterical Graphics"
– Score 9 - Computer & Net Player
REDNECK RAMPAGE

Return Fire II

All of the action, none of the thinking



It's the same mindless action – only now it's in 3D

FIRST LOOK THE ORIGINAL RETURN Fire was a thoroughly enjoyable, albeit repetitive, brainless shoot 'em up. It was a simple game— choose a vehicle, attack the enemy, capture their flag and bring it back to your base, all to the strains of classical music. There's nothing quite like a bit of Wagner accompanying bloodshed....

Return Fire II won't toy with the original formula too much. The big change, though, is that it takes the original's overhead view into true 3D, with battles taking place over the usual assortment of desert, jungle, arctic and urban landscapes. As with the original game, you'll have multiple vehicles at your disposal, and it's up to you to determine which one is right for the job. You can choose from the original's helicopters, armored support vehicles and jeeps, or try some of the new aircraft carriers, PT boats and jump jets.

Your 'copter launches a strike at the tank

The original *Return Fire* was a superb two-player game on the consoles, but the PC version was rightly criticized for omitting traditional network or modem play, only allowing the same two player/split-screen multiplayer. *Return Fire II*, on the other hand, will offer 2-16 player network play over the Internet, LAN and a modem. There will also be a simulated deathmatch game where you'll be able to battle AI opponents.

Return Fire II is scheduled for release in March of 1998. All together now..."Dum dum dum dum dum, dum dum dum dum dum, dum dum dum dum dum, dum dum dum dum..." *–Steve Bauman*

Return Fire II • MGM Interactive • Windows 95

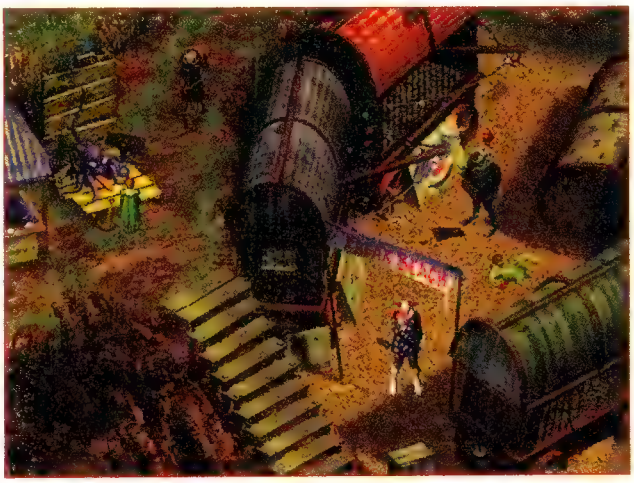
mance, 3Dfx is offering customers of Voodoo Rush-based accelerators a free exchange for a Voodoo Graphics board...**Spector joins ION Storm** – Acclaimed producer Warren Spector has left Looking Glass and joined ION Storm. Spector is best known for producing games such as ***System Shock*** and ***Crusader: No Remorse*** while at Origin. In other news, ***Dominion***, the upcoming real-time strategy game that was being developed by 7th Level, has been acquired by ION Storm and renamed ***Dominion Storm***... **XvT meets 3D** – LucasArts has released the long-awaited 3D patch for ***X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter***. LucasArts says the patch works best with Voodoo-based accelerators...■

Sanitarium

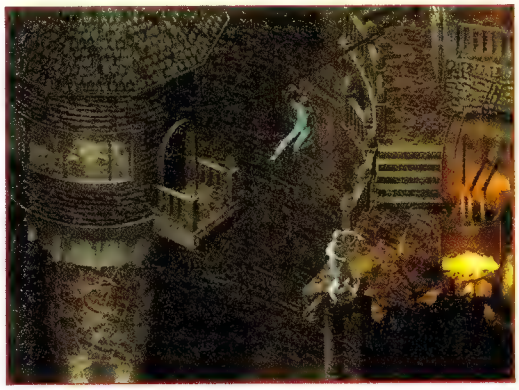
Who am I? Where am I?

FIRST LOOK YOU SLOWLY OPEN YOUR eyes. You touch your face, feeling bandages, which reassures you that your Mummy impersonation is in stellar form. But wait, this is neither a costume party, Halloween, nor homecoming at the anthropologic dig. You don't know what you're doing here. You don't know who you are. You don't know the words to *Happy Birthday*. One thing you do know—you must leave this place.

Sanitarium, developed by the folks at DreamForge Intertainment, is a mystery adventure in which the mystery is *you*. As you begin the game, you are faced with a direct sense of purpose—to find out what the hell is going on here. What you do *not* have are the tools to explore your situation, especially the most valuable tool of all—information. As you gather some, bit by bit, the shards that would define your situation begin to reveal a pattern. The focus becomes clearer and clearer and it soon becomes apparent that even if you *do* put together the pieces that define you, there is something much greater at stake.



Hmmm. Perhaps it's best you don't remember



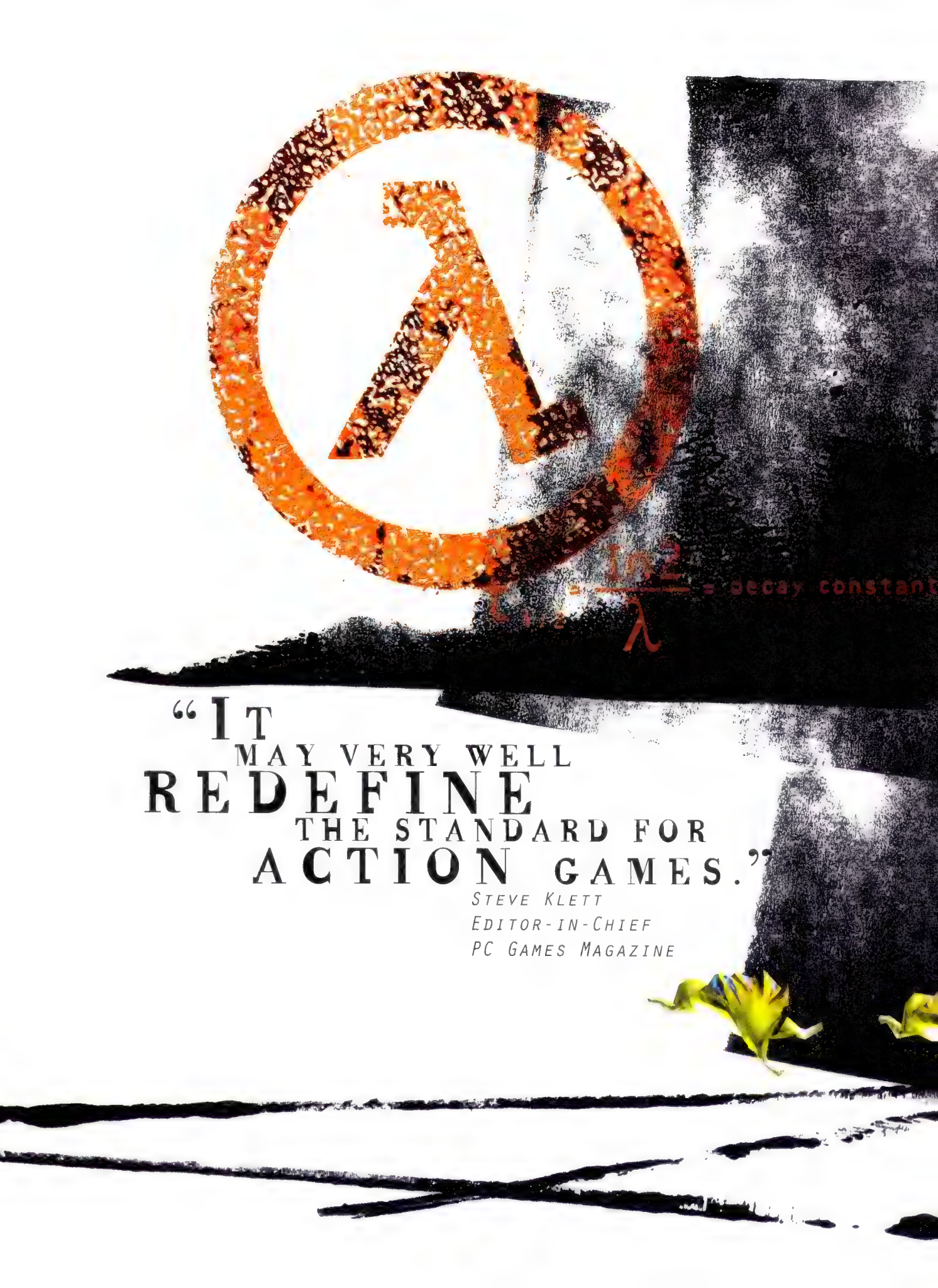
The clothesline maneuver – a classic

The designers are trying to target what they feel is a neglected audience: "players who thrive on games that are rich in atmosphere, games that encourage an emotional connection to the central character."

In three-quarter, third-person perspective, *Sanitarium* uses non-tile-based technology to provide a photo-realistic, 3D rendered environment, what they call an "invisible interface," and a scene-driven, digital soundtrack.

The next time you ponder self actualization, imagine what it might be like to know *nothing*, and expect to see a lot more about this title which is scheduled to find its own identity late in 1998. *–Cindy Yans*

Sanitarium • ASC Games • Windows 95



"IT MAY VERY WELL REDEFINE THE STANDARD FOR ACTION GAMES."

STEVE KLETT
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
PC GAMES MAGAZINE

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ESRB
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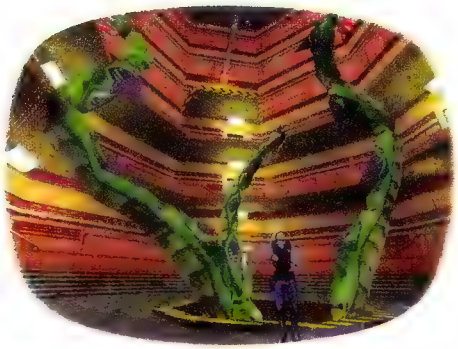
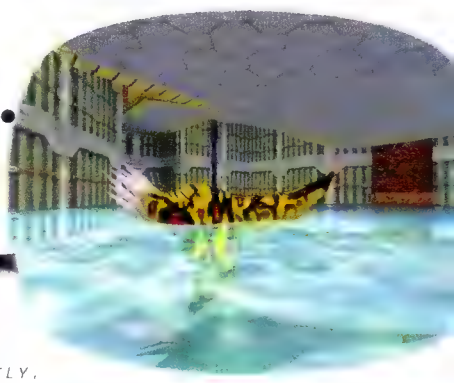


SHE'S SMART, HAS A GREAT PERSONALITY, AND KNOWS THAT THE WAY TO A MAN'S HEART IS THROUGH HIS STERNUM.



SHE'S A TRAINED GOVERNMENT ASSASSIN WHOSE ONLY GOAL IS TO SILENCE YOU— PERMANENTLY. AND YOU'RE RUNNING OUT OF PLACES TO HIDE.

THINK THE ONLY OPPONENTS WORTH FIGHTING ARE THOSE YOU MEET IN A DEATHMATCH? THINK AGAIN. WITH HALF-LIFE'S ADVANCED CHARACTER AI, YOU'LL BATTLE ENEMIES SO SMART, YOU'LL SWEAR THEY'RE ALIVE. THEY'LL TAKE COVER, RECRUIT OTHERS AND WORK TOGETHER TO BRING YOU DOWN.

AND THE REALISM DOESN'T STOP THERE. THINGS ACT, LOOK AND SOUND LIKE THEY DO IN THE REAL WORLD. WE COULD FILL YOUR HEAD WITH TERMS LIKE 16-BIT COLOR, FULL-SPECTRUM LIGHTING, DSP SOUND, AND SKELETAL ANIMATION. WHAT IT ALL MEANS TO YOU IS A GAME SO REAL, SO UNPREDICTABLE, SO ALIVE, YOU'LL SWEAR IT HAS A PULSE. ADD A 3D CARD AND YOUR OWN PULSE WILL RACE. CREATE CUSTOM LEVELS WITH WORLDCRAFT 2.0 (INCLUDED). OF COURSE THERE ARE MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS— FOR UP TO 32 PLAYERS. BUT HOW MANY OF YOUR FRIENDS ARE AS BEAUTIFUL AS SHE IS, OR AS DEADLY?

PLAY THE DEMO @ www.sierra.com/half-life

HALF-LIFE

Where the hell...

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THE CRITICS AGREE

"MicroProse's game offers weeks to months of gameplay."
Computer Gaming World, June '97
★★★★

"Magic: The Gathering is just what the Samite Healer ordered."
Computer Games Strategy Plus, June '97
★★★★

"Magic: The Gathering is a near-perfect translation of the card game."
PC Magazine, June '97
★★★★

"...hard-core gamers will appreciate the flexibility offered in the computer version."
Newsweek, April '97

...did you get those cards?

erty of their respective holders.

Summon Banshee
: Banshee deals X damage, half (rounded up) to you and half (rounded down) to target creature or player.
Some say Banshees are the hounds of Death, baying to herd their prey into the arms of their master

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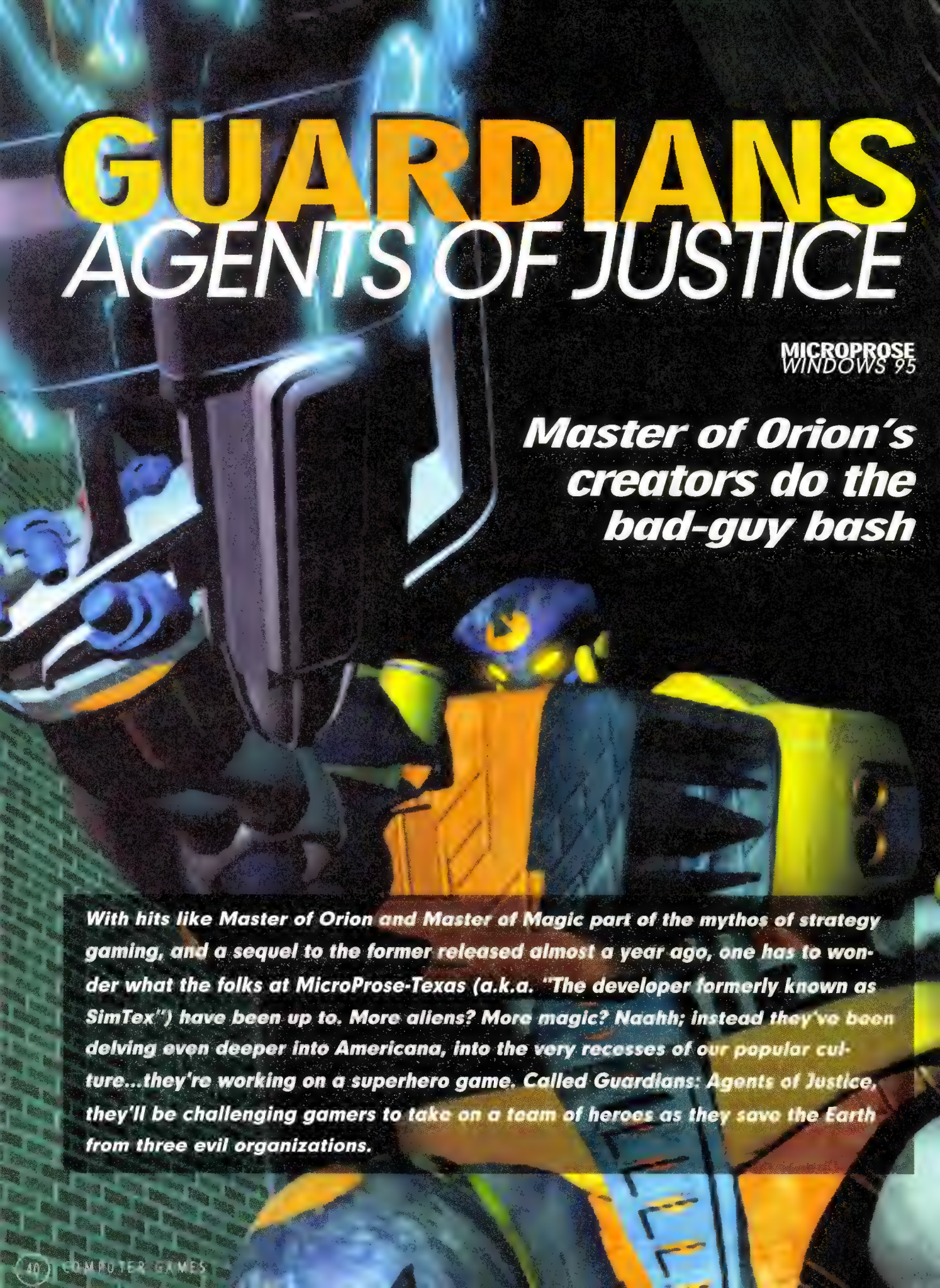
Master of Orion's creators do the bad-guy bash



With hits like Master of Orion and Master of Magic part of the mythos of strategy gaming, and a sequel to the former released almost a year ago, one has to wonder what the folks at MicroProse-Texas (a.k.a. "The developer formerly known as SimTex") have been up to. More aliens? More magic? Naahh; instead they've been delving even deeper into Americana, into the very recesses of our popular culture...they're working on a superhero game. Called Guardians: Agents of Justice, they'll be challenging gamers to take on a team of heroes as they save the Earth from three evil organizations.

The cursed game

While superheroes and computers seem like an obvious marriage, other such projects have either flopped or never even see the light of gamers' screens. The most infamous "super-vaporware" is the computer conversion of *Champions*, and Bullfrog's *The Indestructables* ranks up there as well (although the rumor mill indicates it may not be as dead as it appears); the only games to actually come out have been arcade fighting games. When asked about the "curse" and what he thought about it, SimTex' Steve Barcia, *Guardians'* designer, says "Obviously America likes superheroes (I don't know about the rest of the world, but America does). It's beyond just reading comic books, it's taking comic books and putting them into a computer game. I think we like the idea of superheroes, and that's really more what we [MicroProse] are shooting for as opposed to being real true to comic books—that is just background but not the objective."

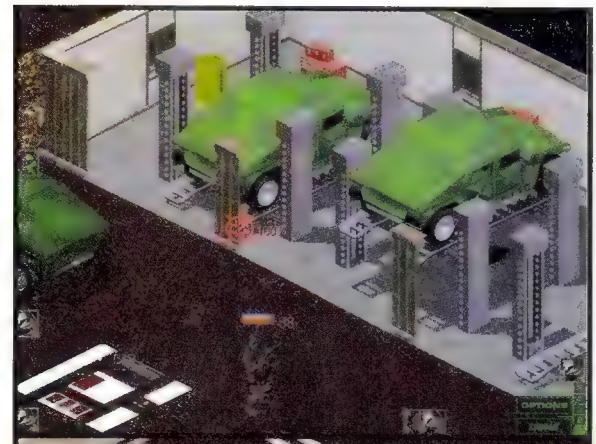
Under development for two and a half years, the game's design has been pretty much locked in place from the start, with only some tweaking (reduction in the number of heroes, for example) and a few mid-development improvements (the game was shifted to 16-bit color artwork). Set about 100 years in the future, the storyline is pretty standard superhero fare; says Barcia "Superheroes are starting to pop up, both villains and heroes. As an organization you're trying to recruit the heroes and coordinate them in order to fight in battle with three organizations before they destroy the world in their own fashion."

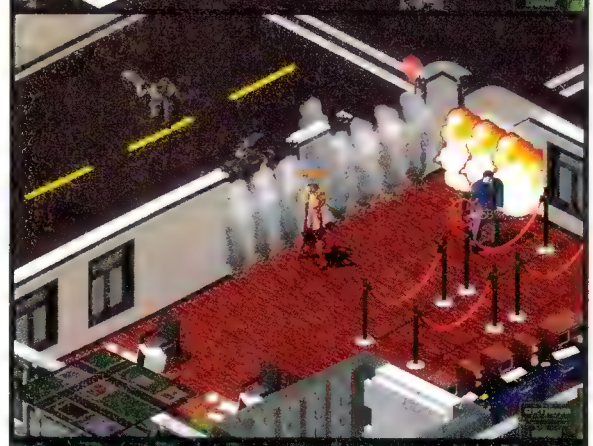
Save the world three times over

The organizations you face—the Tech Lords, the Claw, and the Shadowyn—each form a global threat you must deal with. While they never join forces, they work towards their goals simultaneously. It's your job to gather a force for Good to combat the world-wide activities of the three organizations. Like you, these evil doers start relatively small, and have to build towards their ultimate goal of destruction (what Barcia calls "apocalyptic missions") by first gathering resources and power-through-terror. You'll have to fight through approximately 45 missions in a campaign game (at 15 to 30 minutes a mission) to defeat the bad guys; while you could theoretically take an organization out early on, it would take deft handling of small numbers of weak heroes to do so, so it's more likely that you'll end up meeting strong Super Villains (the evil equivalent to your heroes—unlike evil Mercs and Minions, they increase in power over time) and each organization's Arch Villain.

While you can encounter organizations the world around, they generally make mischief in their own geographical areas (a consideration when you place your base and start assembling your force). Says Barcia, "The Tech Lords [North America], are heavily armored, robotic; the Shadowyn [Asia] are like ninja magicians, they have black magic and are like the Yakuza would be; and then the Claw [Europe] are mutants—they have a spread of powers and are beast-like, genetically engineered." Each organization shares a base set of bad guys in the form of Mercs (although the Mercs of a particular organization will reflect the specific powers of that organization), then moves up to custom Minions and the aforementioned Super Villains and Arch Villains. Because the organizations have specific evil tendencies and powers (while they share some superhero powers, they have some of their own, too), it'll be up to you to create a team that can deal with them all (matching powers to powers is a big part of the game, according to Barcia. He says "imagine rock-paper-scissors carried to the extreme").

At the strategic level it's your job to plop down a base and start



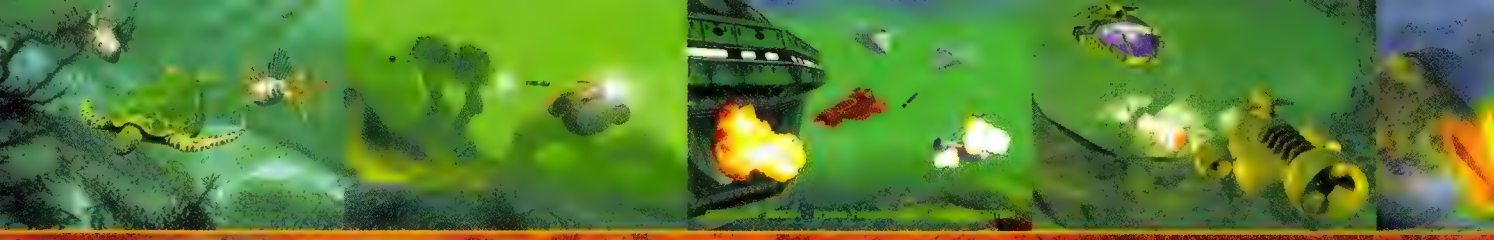


(top to bottom)

Vehicles in the game include civilian and police cars, APCs, and more

Inside a bank Scarlet takes down the evil doers...of course, the bank's owners won't be too happy at the destruction she's wrought

Quake delivers a pounding to a Merc



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ONCE YOU DIVE INTO ITS DEPTHS,

SUB CULTURE

YOU MAY NEVER RESURFACE.

PC CD-ROM

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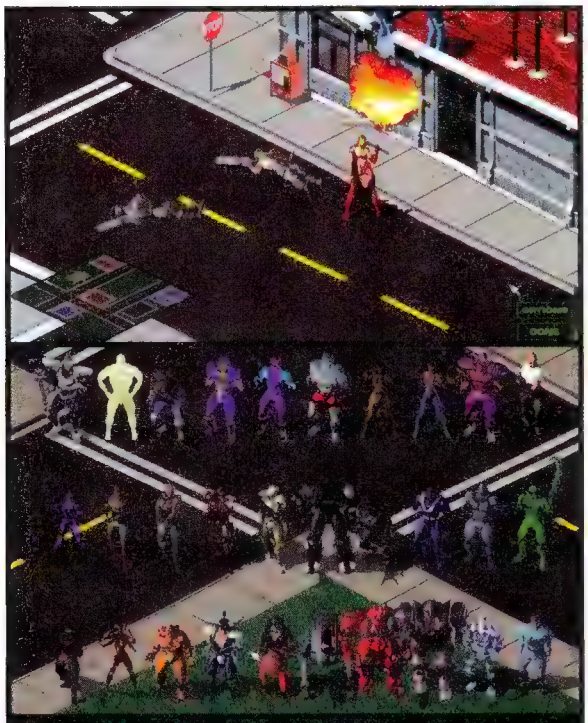


[top to bottom]

Scarlet, after taking out the bumpkins outside, arranges entry into the building

Some of the boys and girls gather for a group shot before the fun begins

Table 1: A smattering of superheroes

Scarab

A *Mystical* character, Scarab may develop powers of the mind for both attack (*Metal Blast, Mind Control, Telekinesis*) and defense (*Deflection, Force Field*). She may *Fly* against foes or *Teleport* into their midst, but unless you've chosen to develop her *Awareness* skills this may be dangerous. If you expect to go on particularly dangerous missions, she may be a necessity, as she is the only hero with the power of *Healing*.

Scarlet

Like Scarab, Scarlet relies on *Mysticism*. Her powers, however, tend towards the more magical, be they attacks (*Energy Blast, Sorcery*) or her special power (*Cosmic Force*). As with Scarab she can *Fly* or *Teleport*, and defends herself via a *Force Field* instead of heavy armor (not much armor protection in those "few bright scraps of cloth").

Andromeda

Andromeda combines skills of *Hand-to-hand* and *Physics* to deliver her *Flash* attack. With only *Armor* for defense, she'll have to use her many movement capabilities (*Flight, Phasing, Super Speed, Teleport*) and special abilities (*Awareness, Cosmic Force*) to protect her.

Hunter

Hunter's mix of *Biochemistry* and *Targeting* skills, combined with his wide variety of potential attacks (*EB* [*Fire, Laser, Blaster*], *Entangle, Flash, Projectile* [*Automatic, Single Shot*]) to make him a potent offensive hero. He augments his *Armor* defense with *Enhanced Vision* and plain ol' *Luck*.

Mongrel

Mongrel likes to get down 'n' dirty, with skills in *Acrobatics* and *Biochemistry* (of all things!) helping him deliver dangerous *Hand Weapon* attacks. His attacks can be aided by levels of *Invulnerability* and by moving at *Super Speed*; *Enhanced Vision* and *Regeneration* don't hurt either.

recruiting superheroes. In the vein of *X-COM*, you'll spend about 10-15% of your game time at this level, but it will be very important game time. You'll use the fame you garner by successfully completing missions to attract new heroes (up to six in the campaign game; see below) and improve your base. Your base starts out as a bare-bones facility barely able to support your team, but can be improved with new or expanded structures. Take a bare-bones gym and pump it up into a high-tech "danger room," or gradually turn your basic hospital into a super-facility that can clone dead heroes.

You'll have a War Computer which allows you to track evil activity; early on the information it can gather is minimal, and you may not even learn of some missions. "Ops" skills can help you learn inside details of upcoming activities, and eventually will grow good enough to allow you to hand-off low-threat missions to the police and armed forces of the threatened regions (in other words, as you're building up for the big fights you won't have to be bothered by all the little bank robberies). As you grow in power, you'll find out more and more about missions pending or current. There will inevitably be more missions than you can handle; judging what's most important will be one of your biggest tasks.

Just how do you fight without falling out of that suit?

While the story and gameplay may be interesting, one of the biggest draws of *Guardians* is its heroes and the ability it gives players to tweak them. The game currently sports ten heroes (and one surprise); while it originally had some 18 heroes, this count was reduced so that each hero would be quite distinct from all the others (see **Table 1** for a sample list of heroes; these are ones MicroProse is certain will be in the game). While you can tweak the powers of a hero, their body forms and appearances are not customizable. This is largely due to graphics constraints; says Barcia, "We just have *way* too many animations; at one time we were up 750,000 frames of [character] animation. We had to trim that to fit on one CD; I think we're now around 400,000." He does say that they are considering tinting the characters for the head-to-head "Battle Royale" mode, but this is by no means a certainty.

Other than the special hidden character, heroes are not fully customizable, largely because of play balancing—you wouldn't want everyone developing a superhero tank-rush by making multiple copies of the very best possible combination of traits.

"Basically, the characters are what we call 'templated,'" says Barcia. "We have about 70 powers [see **Table 2**] in the game right now, and each character has a unique mix of these powers, including movement, defense, attack, and special. We have tried to template all the characters so they each have a theme. There is variety; each character has to choose from between eight to twelve powers. You don't have to buy all of them; you can buy any one that you want [from within the template]—it represents the theme of the character and the type of character that you can make.

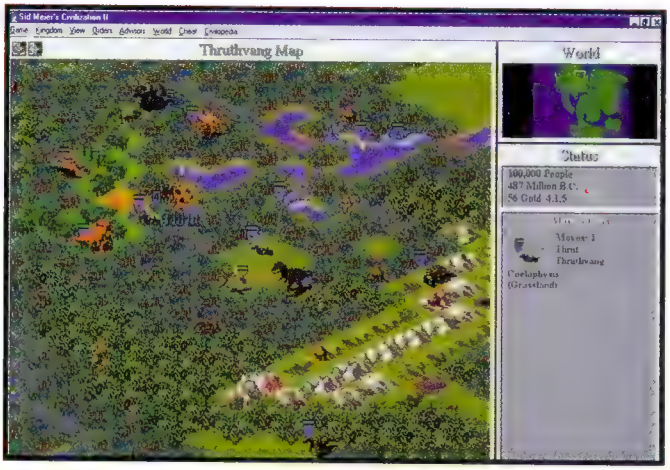
"We have defaults on the characters already. If you want to, you can chose that character as-is and run with it; otherwise you can also choose to customize the character. If you go like 'Oh, no, I wanted her to have this power instead, or I wanted her to have more of this than she has, I like this better,' it's up to you; you can scrap everything that she has and then, within the boundaries of the character's template, define the character in the form that you wish."

Down 'n' dirty

Once you've got a team started and have found an appropriate mission, it's time to rumble. Use your base's transportation assets (at the start a relatively slow plane, but eventually teleporters) to move to the mission site (you may wish to leave some heroes at home to guard the base). The game sports a variety of mission types and locales. The bulk of the missions generated will be what the *Guardians* team calls "resource improvement" —the evil organizations are out to improve *their* resources through activities such as bank robberies, raids on military facilities and secret installations, and so forth. Other missions include kidnappings, jail breaks, base assaults (you hit theirs or they might invade yours), assassinations, frame attempts (where your heroes get framed for evil deeds), decoy missions, and "deathtrap" ambushes; in all, there will be over 60 separate mission types. Missions have six threat levels ranging from routine to critical; the higher the threat, the higher the probable difficulty, importance, and rewards (if

Some very CIV-il projects

While MicroProse won't admit to any specific plans for a *Civilization III* or a *Master of Magic II*, there are some projects underway for additions to the *Civilization* family. Already announced is the *Civilization II "Fantastic Worlds"* pack, a set of fantasy sci-fi scenarios (including Mars and Atlantis) and the *Civilization II Construction Set*. Not previously discussed but currently underway (at both the Austin and Hunt Valley studios) is a project nicknamed *Civilivation 2.5*. Basically, this project is looking at ways to add multiplayer to *Civilization II* in some form; whether this ends up being *CivNet II* or not is uncertain. MicroProse *did* say that the project will also be a test-bed for future activities, which is another indication that there will be a *Civilization III* or *Master of Magic II* somewhere down the road.



No, it's not Civ II's hidden dinosaur level; instead, it's a whole new Civ world

you win) or penalties (if you fail, or if you pass on the mission). Missions are turn-based, "I-go, you go," although, as in other games of this genre, left-over action points may be used by both heroes and villains during their opponent's turn.

While much of the terrain has an urban feel, there are a variety of other terrain types as well (sometimes with cities or structures on top): tundra, jungle, temperate, even a volcano. Maps are, as in *X-COM*, isometric and semi-random; for example, while one bank robbery mission may have a different layout from another, you can be sure there will be a bank in there somewhere. Unlike *X-COM*, the maps can be rotated, so you'll never have trouble tracking the action. Buildings can take damage and be destroyed; while fun to watch, such destruction also has gameplay repercussions: collapse a roof, and any enemies on it will fall down and take damage or be killed, as will any civilians and heroes underneath. Cause too much damage in a scenario and you'll take a hit to your fame level, so watch where you throw those bad guys.

Superfriends or superfoes?

While the core of gameplay revolves around the solo-player campaign, multiplayer hasn't been forgotten. Up to six gamers can join together for cooperative campaign play, or two players can go head-to-head in the Battle Royale

Table 2: Super Powers, Skills, and Power Masteries

Note: While this list is extensive, it's not complete; there are some skills and powers not on the list, and some may drop off before the game ships.

Attack Powers	
Energy Blast	A group of attack powers (fire blast, ice blast, lightning, laser, and blaster) with their own effects, each does energy damage
Entangle	Binds an opponent, immobilizing him or her until he or she breaks free; good when a capture is required
Flash	Creates a blinding white flash that temporarily reduces a target's visual capabilities
Grab	Something all characters can do, it's similar to entangle but has no range
Hand Weapon	Any type of melee weapon or special body part that can act as one
Mental Blast	A direct attack on an opponent's psyche; characters with cybernetics are immune
Mind Control	Attempt to directly control the action of others; characters with cybernetics are immune
Poison	Character shoots globules of poison
Projectile	Anything that can be thrown or fired, this class of attack objects do physical damage
Sorcery	Allows character to cast a spell that mimics the effects of any of several powers or skills
Telekinesis	Allows hero to grab an opponent or object from a distance and throw it
Defense Powers	
Absorption	Channel energy attacks
Armor	Additional protection from physical and energy attacks
Cyberenetics	Mechanical appendages and/or electronic implants, they reduce the effects of stun and make the character immune from mental powers and awareness detection
Deflection	Deflect any ranged, non-area physical or energy attack
Force Field	Additional protection from physical and energy attacks
Invisibility	Blurs a hero, making him or her harder to see
Invulnerability	Allows a hero to ignore the painful effects of a wound
Movement Powers	
Flight	"Up, up, and awaaaayyyyy!"
Phasing	Allows hero to become non-corporeal and pass through walls
Super Speed	Hero moves very fast (gives hero more action points)
Teleport	Character instantly moves from one location to another
Special Powers	
Awareness	A sense of imminent danger (detect non-cybernetic organisms within three squares)
Bomb	Not really a power but a scenario-dependent capability. Hero activates, but instead of a range the bomb has a timer
Cosmic Force	Allows character to draw energy from the cosmos, choosing to release it in powers like awareness, darkness, density, enhanced vision, force wall, light, luck, and regeneration
Darkness	Creates a region of darkness around the target

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IT ACTUALLY TRAVELS AT ABOUT MACH 2
COMING SOON

Table 2: Super Powers, Skills, and Power Masteries (continued)

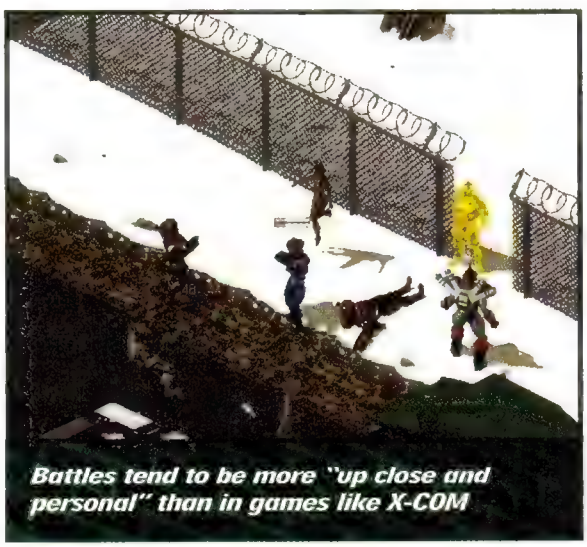
Special Powers	
Density	Allows character to add mass without increasing in size
Enhanced Vision	Improves a character's visual capabilities
Force Wall	A 5x5x5 wall of force that blocks movement and most attacks
Healing	Allows hero to heal stun damage and recover spent endurance
Light	Light brightens a target area, eliminating darkness penalties there
Luck	Protects a hero favorably—but randomly—in all dice rolls
Regeneration	Allows a hero to heal automatically, even when unconscious
Skills	
Acrobatics	Character can tumble and dodge attacks as well as recover quickly from them
Claw Ops	Allows character to gain knowledge of Claw activities; requires skill in biochemistry and mutagenic processes
Hand-to-hand	Improve's characters melee attack and defensive ability against adjacent enemies
Shadowyn Ops	Allows character to gain knowledge of Shadowyn activities; also gives knowledge of the location and use of magical artifacts and basic understanding of several spell casting disciplines
Targeting	More accuracy in attacks
Tech Lord Ops	Allows character to gain knowledge of Tech Lord Activities; also gives knowledge of cybernetics, AI theory, and programing
Villainous Skills	***(only available to your opponents)***
Power Drain	Steals a hero's power
Radiation Blast	Half normal energy attack damage, there is no defense; also, heroes hit with it must automatically recuperate in the hospital
Shapechange	Allows villains to assume the guise of agents, civilians, police, etc.; will revert to true form when they attack
Stasis	An attack that puts targeted hero in a stasis bubble, effectively removing him or her from the game for a period of time
Transmute	Turns a character to stone for a period of time measured in one day per point of the attack that exceeds the hero's defense level
Power Masteries	***(lets you modify attacks in some special fashion at expense of reduced effectiveness or increased cost)***
Auto Fire	Fires off 3 shots per level of autofire
Enveloping	Energy attack envelopes enemy and continues to do damage until enemy unconscious or attack dissipates
Explosive	Power hits a square and explodes in a 3-square-per-explosion-level radius
Extra Knock Back	Doubles the damage for purposes of calculating effective knock back
High Impact	Attack inflicts the maximum amount of damage
Homing	Base 100% chance to hit; only range modifiers apply
Indirect	Attempt to hit squares (not enemies) not in line-of-sight of character
Killing	Increases the deadliness of an attack, tripling all body damage that penetrates an opponent's armor
Line Effect	Directs a power attack in a channel that extends 10 squares from a hero
Multi Strike	Attacks all appropriate targets within attacker's line-of-site, with attacks resolved separately
No Range Penalties	Attack suffers no range modification penalties
Piercing	The target automatically takes body damage equal to the level of the attack (in addition to normal damage)
Stunning	Triples all stun damage done to a target
Vampiric	One half of all damage inflicted on an enemy is transferred back to the attacker as healing

mode. In cooperative play, each player takes on the role of a single superhero. The initiator of the game becomes the team leader, and is responsible for managing strategic activities (although a chat mode allows input from all players) and choosing the missions. While there is no option for players to fight a single, random battle, the multiplayer campaigns will be shorter (maybe 15-20 mission). Play will be balanced, so if you start with six players (heroes), they won't be facing the missions a solo player (who starts with one hero) does; also, they are considering adding the option to start multiplayer games further into the campaign, so gamers don't have to go through a lot of character build-up.

Battle Royale pits two superhero teams against each other. Players can either import existing teams from single player games or, using agreed upon point levels, build up new teams. From there the teams are moved to a fighting field where they can duke it out.

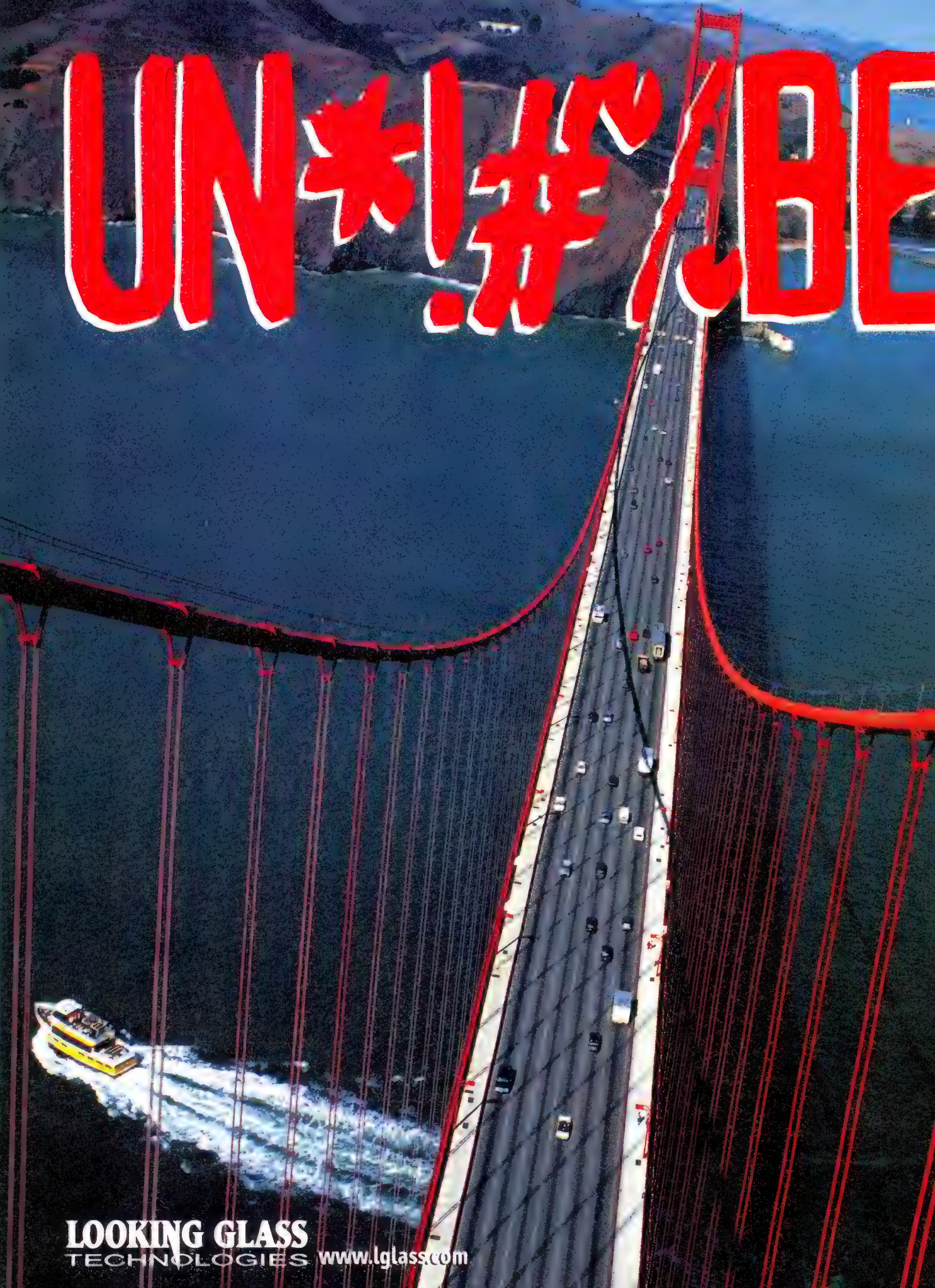
At no point in *Guardians* do you take on the role of the villains (although MicroProse is considering a follow-on product that is described as "darker"). Instead of blood and death, Barcia and his team are aiming to recreate the feel of classic superheroes: bright environments and terrible threats where, if you do your job, good prevails over evil and the villains are brought low. –*Scott Udell*

For more from Steve Barcia, see the full interview on CG Online at www.cdmag.com.



Battles tend to be more "up close and personal" than in games like X-COM

UNCOMMON
UNEXPECTED
UNRIVALED
UNPARALLELED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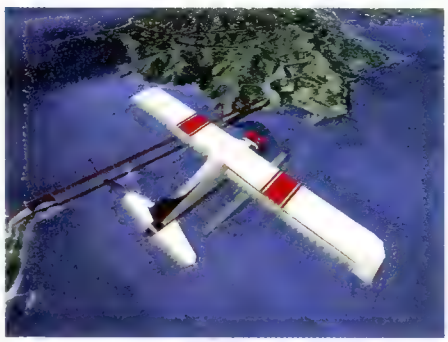

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Microsoft Windows 95

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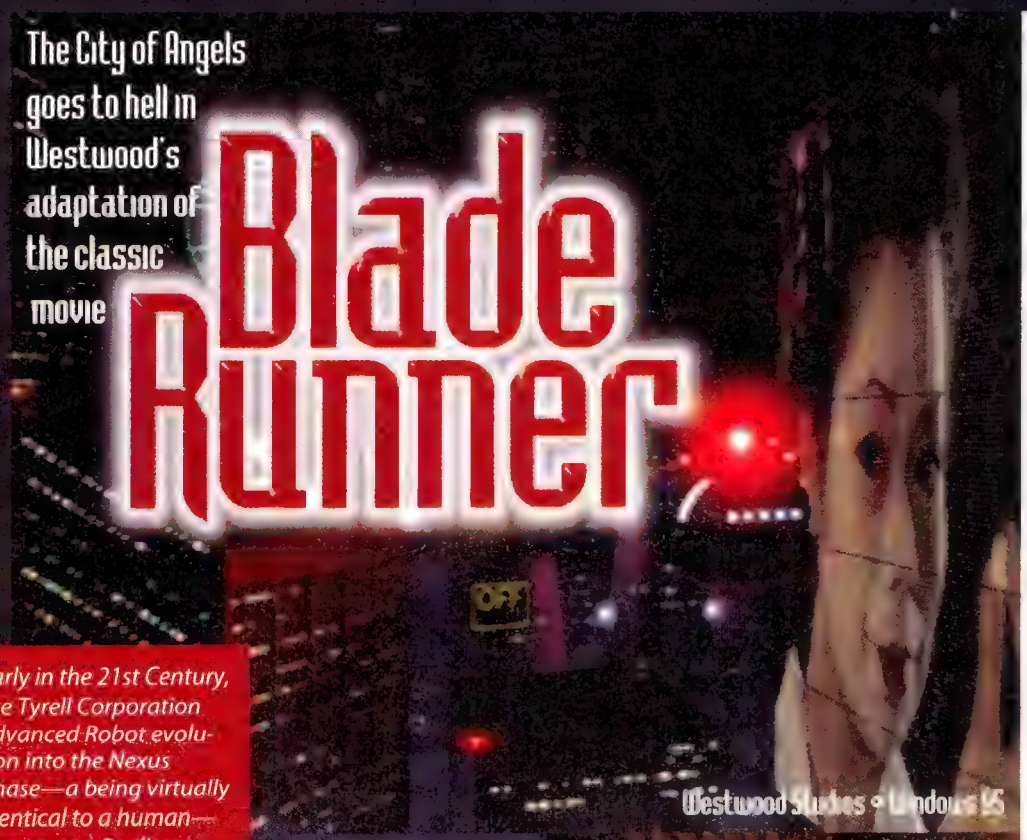
The City of Angels goes to hell in Westwood's adaptation of the classic movie

Blade Runner



Early in the 21st Century, the Tyrell Corporation advanced Robot evolution into the Nexus phase—a being virtually identical to a human—known as a Replicant.

The Nexus 6 Replicants were superior in strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers who created them.

Replicants were used off-world as slave labor, in the hazardous exploration and colonization of other planets.

After a bloody mutiny by a Nexus 6 combat team in an off-world colony, Replicants were declared illegal on earth—under penalty of death.

Special police squads—Blade Runner Units—had orders to shoot to kill, upon detection, any trespassing Replicant.

This was not called execution.

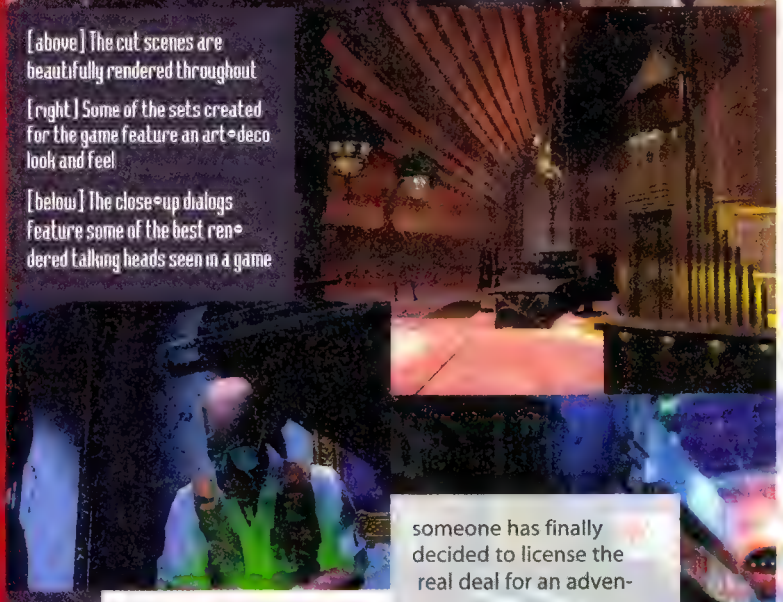
It was called retirement.

Los Angeles – November, 2019

[above] The cut scenes are beautifully rendered throughout

[right] Some of the sets created for the game feature an art-deco look and feel

[below] The close-up dialogs feature some of the best rendered talking heads seen in a game



So began Ridley Scott's groundbreaking 1992 sci-fi *noir* film *Blade Runner*. The opening scenes, a pan over Los Angeles, set the tone for what has become the most influential science-fiction film of the 1980s, if not of all time. After many years of people ripping off its nightmarish vision of a sordid future, someone has finally decided to license the real deal for an adventure game.

That game, *Blade Runner*, unites the talents at Westwood Studios with The Blade Runner Partnership. Westwood is painstakingly recreating all of the sets from the movie in 3D (with consultation from the original movie's "futurist" Syd Mead), and they've even reunited some of the original cast members to recreate their voice roles (alas, no Harrison Ford). Ostensibly an adventure game, Westwood is touting a number of technological innovations, which upon further inspection really aren't very new; visually, however, there's no competition out there for *Blade Runner* the game.

The movie

When the movie was released in 1982, it received a lukewarm critical reception. While praised for its look (*The New Yorker*'s Pauline Kael said in her review, "A visionary sci-fi movie that has its own look can't be ignored: it has its place in film history..."), the near consensus was that the movie was undone by a weak script and story. Leonard Maltin said, "It's defeated by a muddled script and main characters with no appeal whatsoever" while Roger Ebert said, "It looks fabulous...but it is thin in its human story."

Oddly enough, it's just that emphasis on visual qualities over storytelling that makes *Blade Runner* an obvious choice for a computer game and Westwood, with a reputation for cutting-edge rendered visuals, is the perfect developer.

It's gorgeous

The game is rendered in stunning 24-bit color. Many of the screens are static, but Westwood claims that rendered movement between screens, which stays full-screen, will run 15 frames-per-second on a 133MHz Pentium with a quad-speed CD-ROM.

Each character in the environment is modeled with 15,000-40,000 flat-shaded polygons, each a pixel in size. Commonly known as "voxels," this technology is also being used by Sierra's upcom-

ing *Quest for Glory V* as well as a number of other games (it produces more realistic looking human figures than the currently fashionable texture-mapped polygonal figures). Bi-linear interpolation of the polygons is used to smooth the motion-captured animation, and each character can be influenced by up to five light sources at each pixel. They're also z-buffered in each scene (for proper scaling), and are able to move in and out of fog. All in all, they look fabulous, though they still don't blend into the lush backgrounds particularly well.

Real-time adventure?

According to Louis Castle, co-founder of Westwood Studios and both the technical and art director for the game, "When we started the *Blade Runner* project, we knew that [maintaining the] film's atmosphere was imperative, so we spent a lot of time analyzing what made the film great. Obviously the AD [art direction] was part of it, but a lot of the tension that [director] Ridley Scott generated was incredible. So we set out to create a new experience, a real-time adventure game. *Blade Runner* is to an adventure game what *Command & Conquer* is to a war game."

Calling it a real-time adventure is a shrewd attempt to tie-in the game to both the mega-popular real-time strategy genre and distance itself from the somewhat moribund adventure genre. What it really means is that the game runs in real-time, with characters wandering in and out of scenes, each with their own agenda and goals.

You control Ray McCoy, a Blade Runner who's hunting down rogue Replicants at the same time as Deckard, the movie's main character (played by Harrison Ford). You're part of the film as it unfolds without having to play the exact same role as the film (which would eliminate any of the suspense of determining who's a Replicant). During the course of the game, you will even have the opportunity to become a sympathizer and help the Replicants track down the DNA data that will extend their life span.

It's a simulation?

Castle also describes the game as a simulator. It tracks over 100 characters, 70 of which are of the mobile variety. These characters use a database of information to determine their actions, so they react to what you're doing.

The big news about the game engine, though, is the fact that it randomizes the identity of the Replicants and all of the clues used to discover them. These clues are stored in your own database of information—there's no need to take notes. Also eliminated is every adventurer's best friend, an inventory—it's all taken care of for you. Objects will be used automatically when needed. As Castle says, "We took the standard adventure game and made it easier to play."

Mechanically, the game is simple, with its smart cursor and auto-inventory. A lot of the clues in the game will come via photographs of various scenes, and like the movie, you'll use a machine to zoom in and analyze every small detail. Arcade segments will be included, and they consist of targeting things with the mouse and clicking.

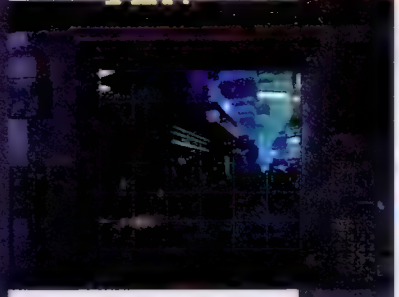
Westwood is promising over 20 hours of gameplay per game.

Replayable adventures

What many gamers dislike about adventure games is their lack of replayability—fans of the genre accept this limitation in order to savor advanced storytelling and puzzle solving. By randomizing the Replicants, *Blade Runner* is attempting to address the replayability issue, but others have made the effort and ultimately failed. How many people played *The Pandora Directive* six or seven times in order to experience all of the twists and turns of its story?

What usually derails replayability is a reliance on the same gameplay mechanics in each game, as well as the problem of repetitive dialogs with gameworld characters (you can only record so much dialog). Will analyzing different photos over and over be as appealing as re-playing a level of *Command & Conquer*? Can it truly feel like an entirely new game? Does any game really feel new every time you play it?

Those questions will be answered in November when the game's supposed to be released. The product has a lot to live up to—the near-mythical status of the film and Westwood's past reputation for quality products is a lethal combination. If it's able to replicate the feeling of dread and decay that the film conveyed so well, it could be a fascinating product. *–Steve Bauman*



[above] The game does a fabulous job at reproducing the grimy neon-glow of the film

[left] The ESPER device is used to analyze photographics

[right] The characters look good from just about any distance

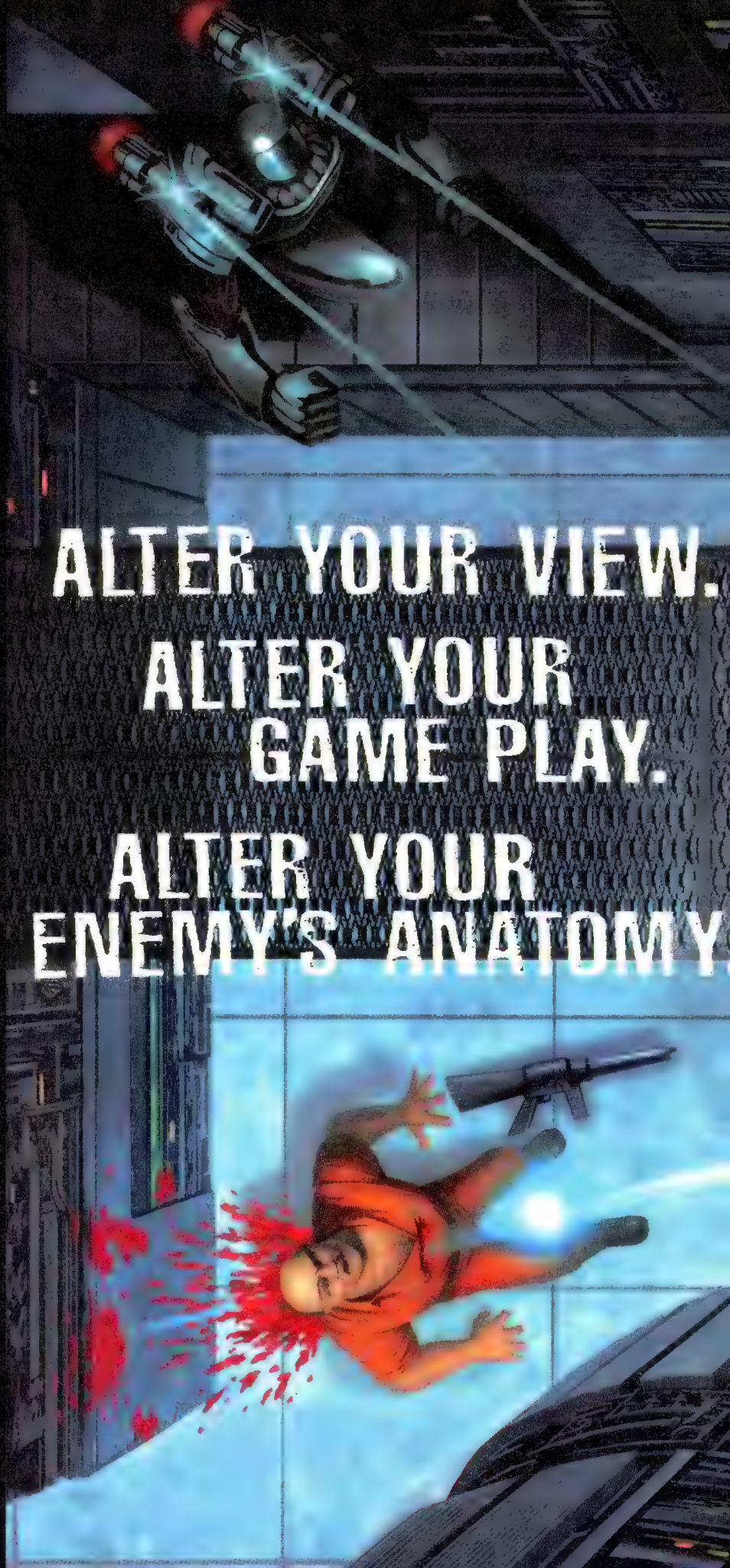
"A refreshing escape from all the me-too action games."
PC Games

"A deeper world than the typical first-person shooter."
Next Generation

"One manic gaming experience."
CNET Gamecenter

"You are starting a whole new style of 3D shooters."
E-mailed Gamer Feedback

"This game has to be the best that I've seen in years!"
E-mailed Gamer Feedback



Mutants, Psychos, Cultists and Punks are converging on you from everywhere; above, below, behind, in front. You definitely haven't been here before. Top-down views don't just change the way the game looks, they change the way 3D action games play. You'll no longer be blindly running into doom, but mercilessly causing it from every conceivable angle.

Blow away enemies on the catwalk above or on the ground below. Grab some homicidal friends and cooperative multiplayer games can actually be just that—cooperative. With some skill, you might survive this post-apocalyptic hell on earth. But watch your back because death is all around you.

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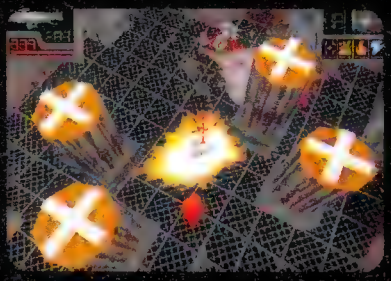
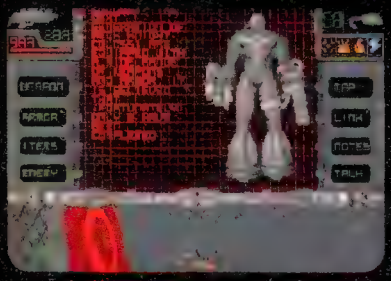
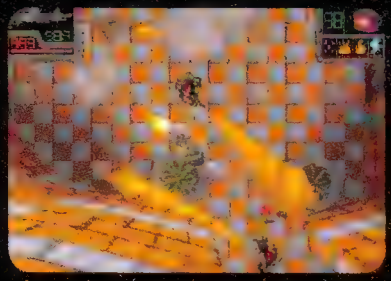


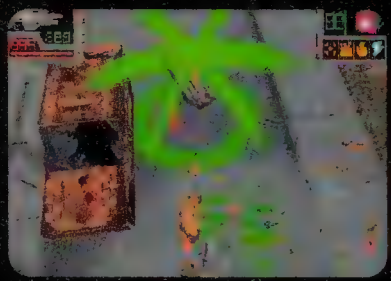
6 unique multiplayer games for up to 8 players, including Assassin, Arsenal and Stockpile.



22 twisted enemies, each with unique combat behavior, plus 21 bone-shredding weapons.



20 non-linear territories: no set path; explore ahead before completing previous levels.



RAVEN SOFTWARE

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MATURE M AGES 17+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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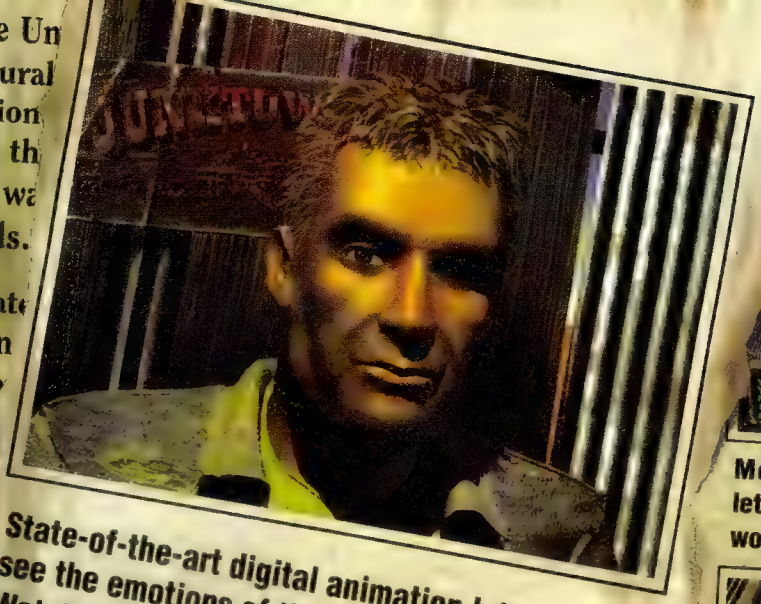

State-of-the-art digital animation lets you see the emotions of the people you talk to. Watch someone smile at your compliment or grow angry at your insults! Your decisions will have significant moral implications.

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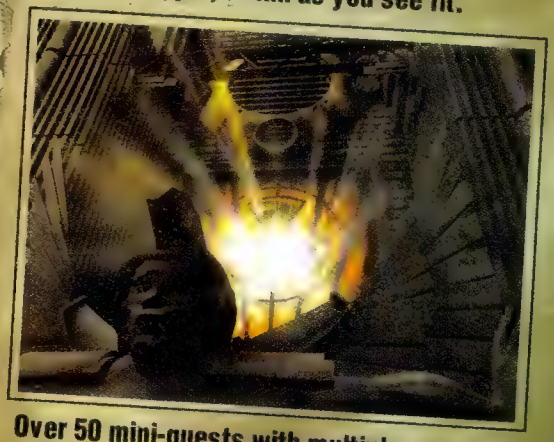
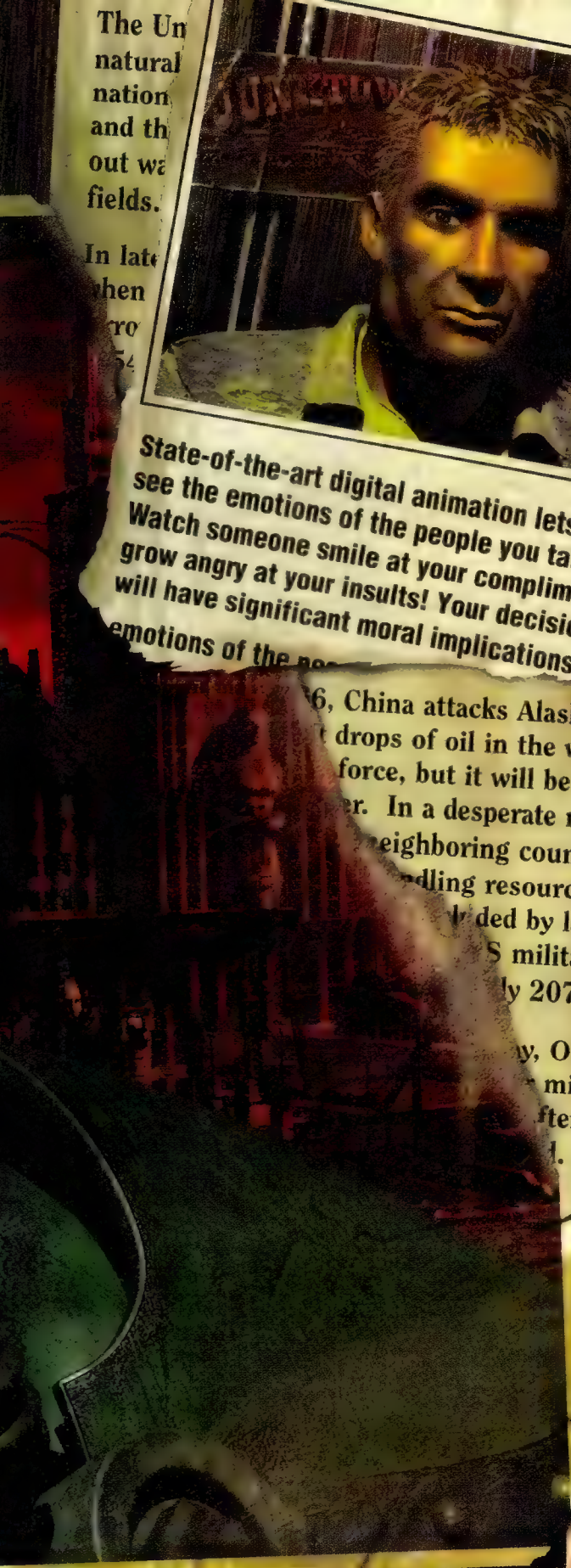
Meticulous turn-based combat system lets you target specific body parts to wound, cripple, or kill as you see fit.



Over 50 mini-quests with multiple solutions take you through devastated wastelands such as Rad Scorpion dens, Junktown, and the Brotherhood of Steel.

Victims don't just perish they get cut in half, melt into a pile of goo, and explode like a blood sausage into chunks of flesh.



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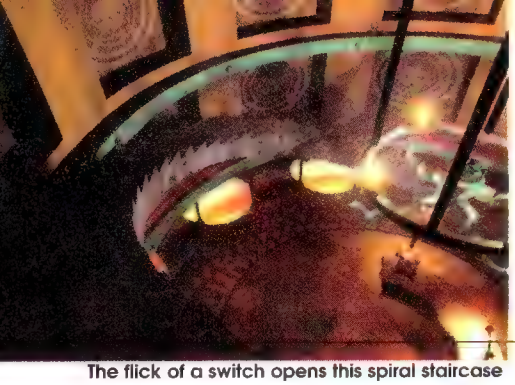
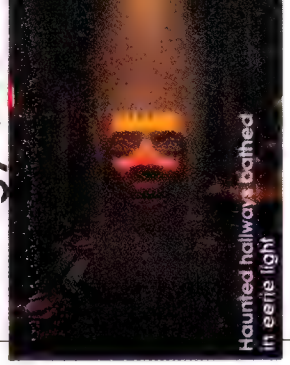
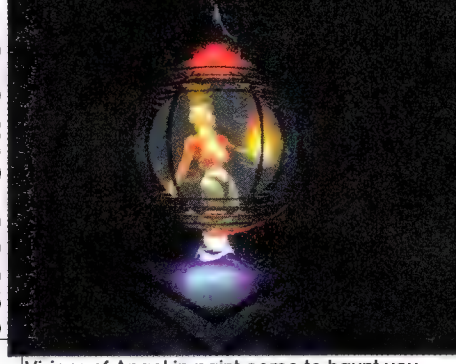
Theology and Judeo-Christian Of Light and Darkness



The flick of a switch opens this spiral staircase



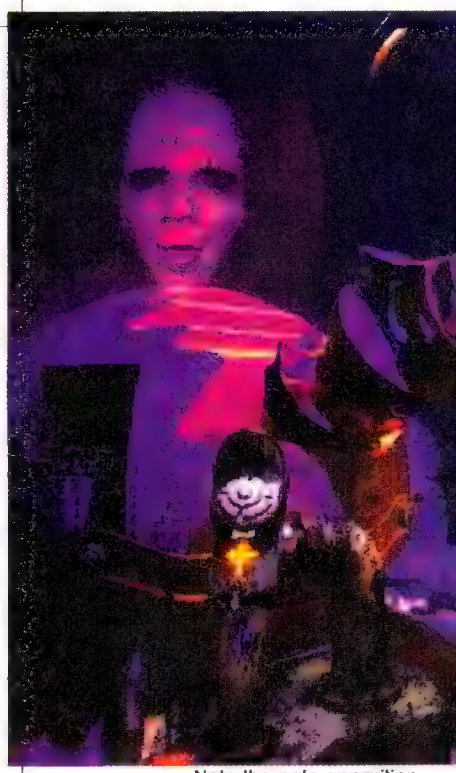


Visions of Angel in paint come to haunt you

If you are familiar with the world of fine art, you have probably come across the work of Gil Bruvel. Some go so far as to call him one of the Living Masters of the art world. His work reflects his ardent quest to observe nature and probe beyond its apparent reality. Not wanting to embrace surrealism as we perceive it, he prefers to call his style "visionary," reflecting a clear conscious state of mind. Whatever you want to call it, most call it breathtaking, and now his magic has migrated from the tangible to the electronic in Interplay's upcoming adventure, *Of Light and Darkness - The Prophecy*.

David Riordan, director of the project through Interplay's Tribal Dreams division, indicates that the inception of this game was a bit out of the norm. In most cases, a game concept exists and artists build a world around it. Here, Interplay's Brian Fargo had an "art world," left over from a previous concept, and, said Riordan (a longtime fan of Gil Bruvel), "I took a look at it and said, 'Wow, what's this?' and Brian said, 'Well, it's nothing. That's the problem.' So he wanted to build a game based upon *that*." With the expertise of designer Cliff Johnson (*The Fools Errand* – one of the niftiest puzzle games ever created), scriptwriter Ken Melville, 3Di technician Eric Whelpley and their talented team, the artworld became a gameworld in one of the most bizarre adventures you're likely to see next year.

The artwork is nothing short of remarkable and it is hence surprising that they decided to go with a 256 color palette, as their compression algorithms work best this way. No matter. 256 colors have rarely seemed so rich, and the game moves like gangbusters, even on non-godlike machines.

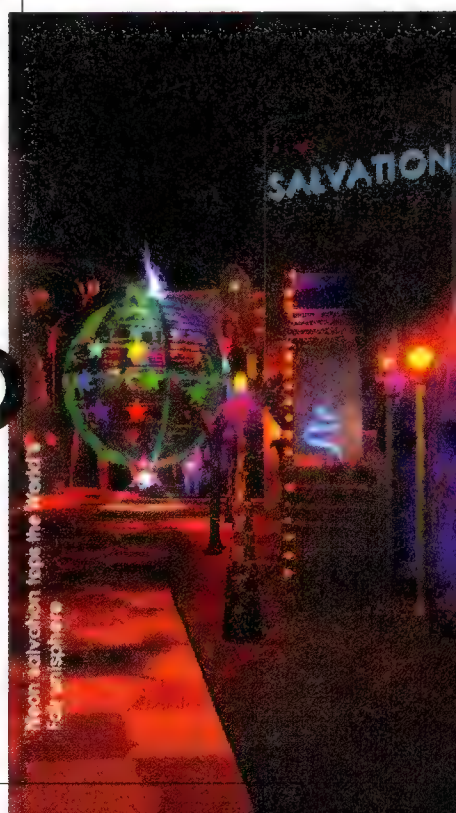


Note the pale apparition

Angel's in the outfield

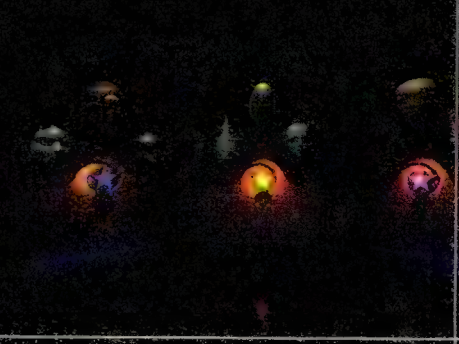
Light and darkness, the classical symbols of conflict, of good and evil, are here represented by two forces. On the lighter side we have Las Vegas showgirl, Angel Gemini. One night, in the middle of her show at Club Raptura (wedged in between the Wayne Newton look-alike contest and the Flying Elvi), Angel has illusions of an upcoming apocalypse. Whether inspired by the end of the world as we know it, or visions of the soon inevitable tricks that gravity plays on a showgirl's wares, Angel announces her final appearance. While speaking to the crowd about the apocalyptic crisis, she is shot and falls backward. Not wanting to believe her dead, her followers preserve her body in a cryogenic chamber. If she can be redeemed in a place she called the Village of the Seven Catastrophes, people believe that she will return to her body, save herself and the world as well.

On the dark side, we have HOB, known by the bureau of census as Gar Hoff. Born into power and wealth in the late 980s somewhere in eastern Europe, Hoff showed great artistic potential. When his crazed adolescent hormones led him to create racy portraits of the young women at court, he was sent by his parents to a school for wayward painters, where he was savagely abused by monks. Seven years later, the school explodes, and his parents are found brutally murdered. Circumstantial? Sure, but nonetheless he was banished to live in a cave in the woods where he led a tortured existence, painting ever more deranged visions on the walls. Townspeople disappear and in a final debacle, the cave collapses, killing Hoff and many villagers who have been driven mad by his paintings. The cave is sealed forever. The Master selects Gar Hoff to be Master of the Dark Lord of the Seventh Millennium, changing his name to Diabolos Asmodeus Beelzebub, diminutively HOB, who aligns himself with apparitions of past sinners to serve him.



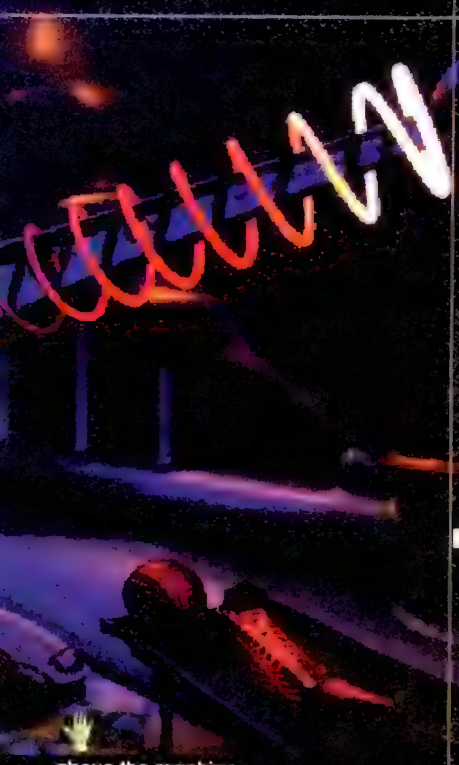
Yo, MF'er

Another important influence in the game is the new media band that calls itself the Millennium Fake Brothers (MF'ers). The band appears on the scene in a small meteor that crashes to earth near Vegas, coincidentally around the same time as Angel's announcement at Club Raptura. The members brought with them Mystic Devices intended to benefit mankind. Being the hapless lunatics they are, they irreverently wasted the Devices, allowing HOB's apparitions to steal them, and begin using them to prepare seven apocalyptic catastrophes that will endanger mankind. HOB then kidnaps Angel's essence, imprisoning her on his Isle of Darkness.



This room offers clues as to the identity of the apparitions

rock on



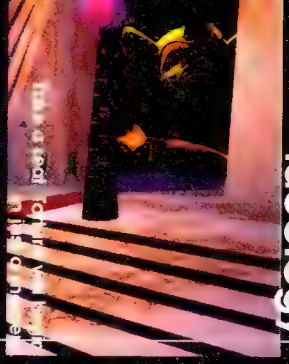
above the machine

The masks tread a fine line between beauty and nightmare

The Prophecy

Interplay • Windows 95

ideology



This is a real apparition

This tame face hasn't become angry quite yet

This is where you come in. You must stop the seven catastrophes from taking place, find a way to the Dark Lord's Isle of Darkness and rescue Angel and the rest of the world. "But how? How?" you shout. Well, buy the game and find out. Oh, all right. You solve the catastrophes by redeeming all of the apparitions in the game, after which you will encounter three Dark Lords and a two pairs of twins – the Wrath twins and the Spendthrift-Miser twins (don't look for them on Doublemint commercials) – who are all guaranteed to make your life truly miserable in what they're hoping will be a fun sort of way.

The apparition pool

Central to the gameplay is dealing with the highest Dark Lord's recruits – the historical apparitions. As you are placed into the Village of the Seven Catastrophes, you are faced with the spirits of the dead. These spirits are delivered to this world in batches, on pools of colored light. Each one of them has committed a heinous crime during his or her lifetime, and each crime may be attributed to their having committed one of the seven deadly sins (Gluttony, Lust, Greed, Envy, Anger, Sloth and Pride, as anyone who has gone to a Christian parochial school might be able to tell you). As you meet them, you must figure out what their crime is, what sin they have hence committed, what artifact is associated with them and what colored light-bus they traveled in on. Sound simple? It's not.

Masks of history

Just who are these apparitions? They tried to pick a number of notorious figures from history, from a variety of cultures whose lives and crimes they thought were interesting – "interesting in a way that a car wreck is interesting," said Riordan. For example, in an age before the dictaphone, there was Shaamra the Scribe (3247 - 3211 B.C.), who brought about the deaths of many of her enemies by cleverly editing letters dictated to her to suit her and others' evil purposes; and Wa-No-Te the Amorous (4117 - 4004 B.C.), whose way with the ladies was infamous across the Siberian peninsula.

Even though there are some cultures that were simply more notorious than others throughout history, they tried to use as many cultures as possible lest protest groups start beating down their doors. "Prejudice! Prejudice! You only gave the Bushmen *one* bad guy and we got three!" shout picketing representatives from the Maori Solidarity League.

The characters are represented by floating masks – an interesting choice. "It went totally against everything I've ever done before," said Riordan, "because I love characters. I came out of the movie business, so things that I've done before all have these real characters that walk around, and you see them and so on. And in the beginning, everything we tried to put in the environment took *away* from the environment. It took away from my first look at it when I said, 'this is really beautiful!' Whatever we did seemed to block that in a way. So I said, 'How do we do this and maintain the integrity of what Gil has created?' And it always came back to the masks. I've always loved masks from a mythological standpoint, and every culture has them. So as I started looking into mask books, it just seemed so natural that we would represent them that way."

As you move around in the game, the apparitions are fairly transparent. They move in and out of the artwork and their visibility is dependent on the light sourcing. In the brighter lights they are fairly visible, although opaque; and in the darker areas they are more mysterious and occasionally invisible. And since they are always traveling, the effect is decidedly eerie and fits in well with Bruvel's art.

A-tension please!

What they truly believe will set this game apart from the rest is a real-time clock that will introduce tension into the game. If you do nothing, the apocalypse will happen around you. Said Riordan, "The adventure game genre has been stagnant for a number of years and we wanted to pump some life back into the category. It needed some freshness" (ever harder and harder to come by these days). He continued, "Adventure films have an edge to them. They keep people on the edge on of their seat. In this game, with the clock ticking and things happening all around you, you kinda get that. And I like that feeling… the feeling that If I don't move and I don't go do things that something bad is going to happen." So now that the *Of Light and Darkness* team has moved, and gone and done things, maybe something good is going to happen. We'll find out next spring. –*Cindy Yans*

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• So freakin' real, your victims will actually beg for mercy and scream for their lives.

• Real-time 3D characters rage against beautifully hand-painted 2D killing fields.

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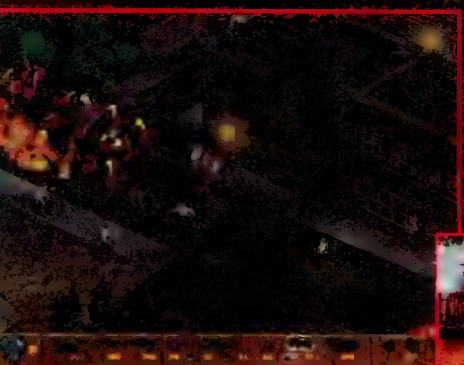
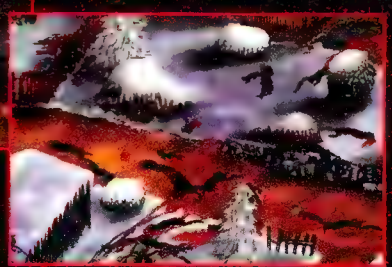
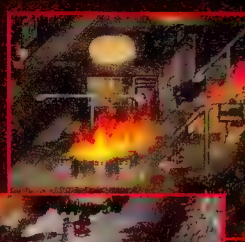
"POSTAL HAS REDEFINED WHAT ACTION GAMING IS ALL
ABOUT, AND YOU'LL BE HEARING A LOT ABOUT THIS ONE FOR A
LONG TIME TO COME. REVIEW SCORE: 10 OUT OF 10"
Winner of the Editor's Choice Award
EnterMedia.Net

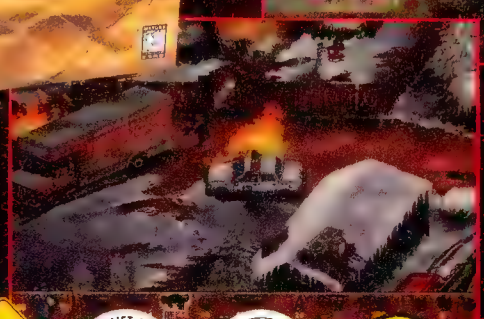


* Mass murder opportunities: spray protesters, mow down marching bands and chainsaw whole towns.



* Multi-player network play over modem, LAN, or the Internet – so you can go Postal with other death row candidates.





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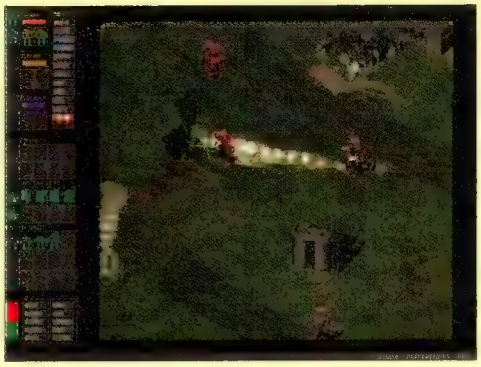
MechCommander

From the "why did it take so long to do this game" file comes *MechCommander*, a real-time strategy game set in the *BattleTech* universe. Developed by FASA Interactive, the software division of the creators of *BattleTech*, it will be published by MicroProse in 1998.

The game features you as a MechCommander (hence the name), and it's up to you to try and retake Port Arthur from the Smoke Jaguar Clan. A spectacular opening movie sets the tone for the game, and even attempts to remove the abstraction of a real-time strategy game interface in a real-life battle. (It shows commanders in a secluded room directing teams of mechs by pointing and clicking on computer monitors.)

The game will include over 30 missions with a branching mission structure, plus multiplayer support for up to six commanders. Each mission will be limited to 12 mechs under your command (from 18 chassis with their own custom armament) , and instead of just managing resources and building up defenses during battle, you'll be managing a roster of pilots. They carry over from mission-to-mission, increasing their skills as they go along. In between missions, players will manage supplies, salvage parts from the previous battle and repair and upgrade the Mechs in your unit.



▲ Mechs leave footprints and bomb blasts leave craters

▶ Another building gets smoked

◀ The game supports multiple resolutions (this is an 800x600 shot) as well as zoom levels

Once in combat, you'll be facing off against enemy Mechs, Elementals and Armored Vehicles. Like most other real-time strategy games, there is a build component—you'll create buildings that produce support vehicles that will be under your control. Mechs have both primary and secondary weapons, and *MechCommander* will allow you to micromanage which you'll use or do it automatically. This aspect was already working in the version of the game used for this article—mechs would switch between short- and long-range weapons based on the proximity of the enemy Mech.

There are a number of slick visual details that set *MechCommander* apart from other games. Subtle details like mechs leaving footprints on the ground prove to have strategic value in that you can clearly tell what type of Mech you're up against (the footprint is determined by the size and weight class of the Mech). Mechs also knock over trees if running through forests, which again helps in tracking the enemy.

(As an aside, do game designers have something against trees? Many of us shot them down for sport in *Magic Carpet*, *Terra Nova* tracked their destruction, *MechCommander* has you plowing them over, with a satisfying "thump.")

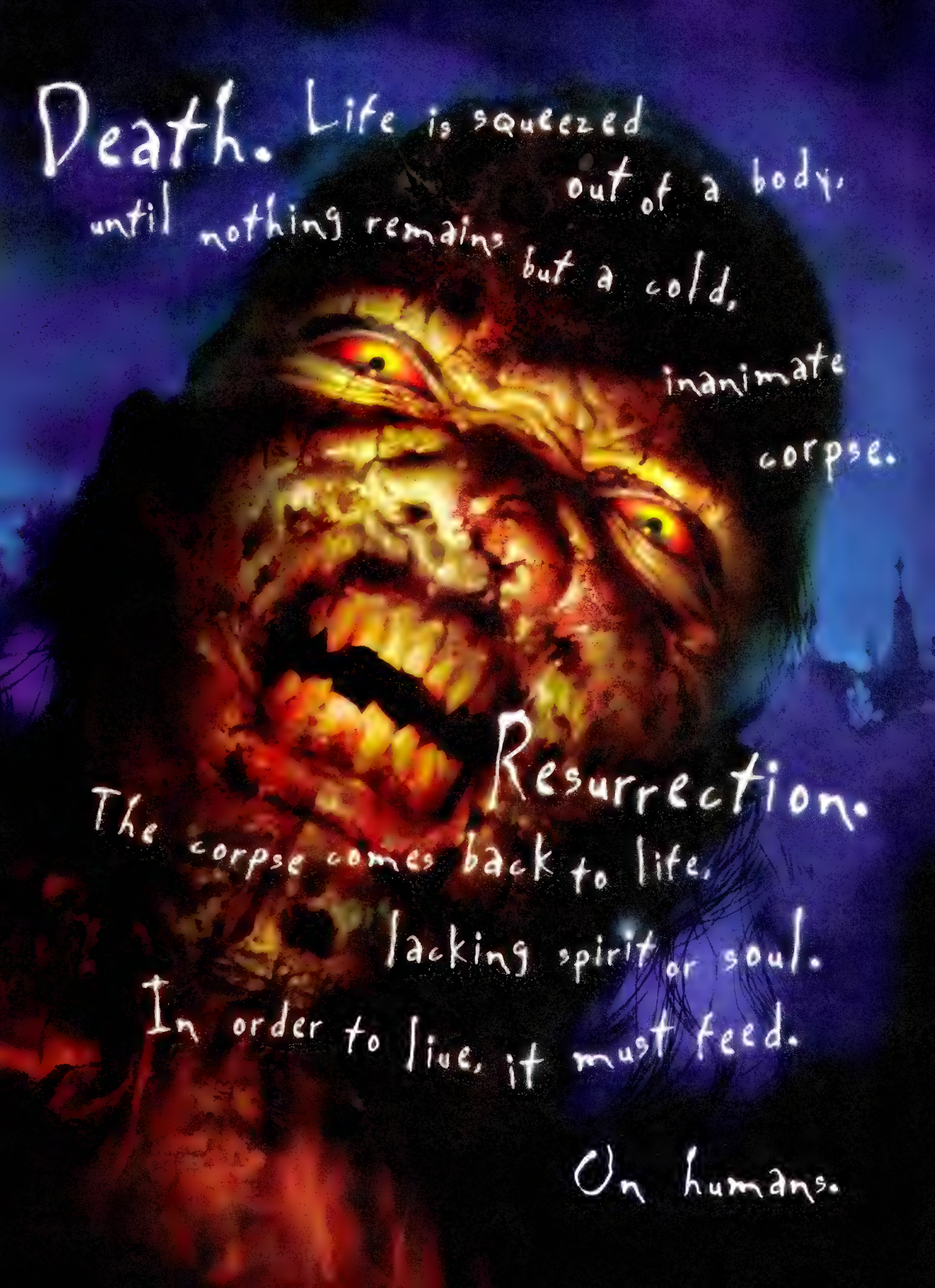
While the interface is far from final (the engine was completed first—now work begins on the story and final interface), it follows the tried-and-true point-and-click conventions established in other real-time strategy games. In the final game, you'll be able to target specific parts of a Mech, but the actual interface for doing that wasn't in place (it most likely will be a 2D graphical representation of the unit, and you point where you want to target).

Visually, the game is quite attractive, with sprite-based mechs and 3D terrain. The game features over 100,000 frames of Mech animation, showing such things as launching your jump jets, mechs being knocked over and pilots ejecting. Players who have machines with more that 16MB of RAM will get even more Mech detail. The game supports multiple screen resolutions (640x480 through 1024x768) and two different zoom levels (up close and personal, where one Mech takes up about a quarter of the display, and the view seen in the screenshots).

When asked about the game's faithfulness to the pen-and-paper *BattleTech* game, designer Tom Dowd said, "We're being as faithful as we can, but we have some flexibility to make our own rules."

Managing a smaller number of units is a unique approach for a real-time strategy game. If executed well, it has the potential to expand the levels of strategic complexity and move the genre away from its current infatuation with speedy clicking. If it's a successful product, maybe we'll see more products that emphasize "strategy" over "real-time." *–Steve Bauman*

Battletech: MechCommander • MicroProse • Windows 95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Resurrection.
The corpse comes back to life, lacking spirit or soul.
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dead to their graves. Again.

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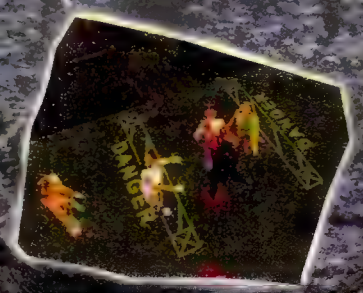
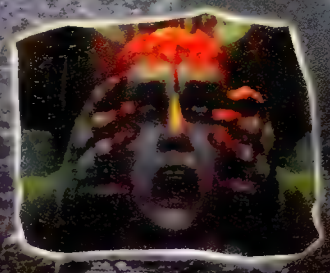


SIMULTANEOUSLY DIRECT THE ACTIONS OF FOUR HUMANS OR FULLY-CONTROL ONE CHARACTER.



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COMING SOON.

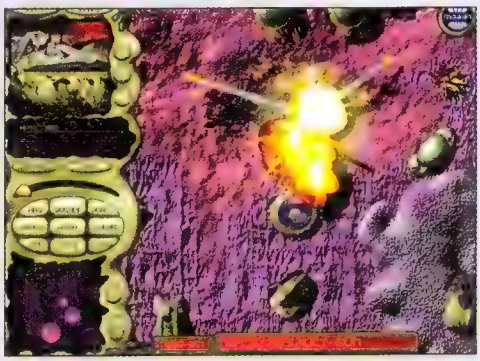
The alien interface with spy cam in the upper left ▶

M.A.X. II

Mechanized Assault & Exploration back in action

Though not the huge seller that *Red Alert* was, the original *M.A.X* was a well-designed and well-reviewed game with plenty of unique strategic options. A visit to Interplay to see *M.A.X. II* in its early stages finds a product that has added real-time combat, impressive terrain and unit graphics, and much improved unit control. According to producer and designer Paul Kellner, almost all enhancements and improvements are based on player input from the original game. Most of the well-received features of the original are only being tweeked and not radically changed.

Continuing in a time after the original *M.A.X.*, the human clans are now allied with the Races of the Concord, a group of eight alien cultures who pair with humans to create MAX commanders. It seems an alien race, the Sheevat, is tearing up the galaxy and have set their sights on humanity. Players may take either side in this epic conflict, commanding units of construction, research and war. Combat occurs on 36 different planets with a planned 48 stand-alone missions and three 9-mission campaigns. A series of historical missions should also join the mix, filling in the history gap between the two games.

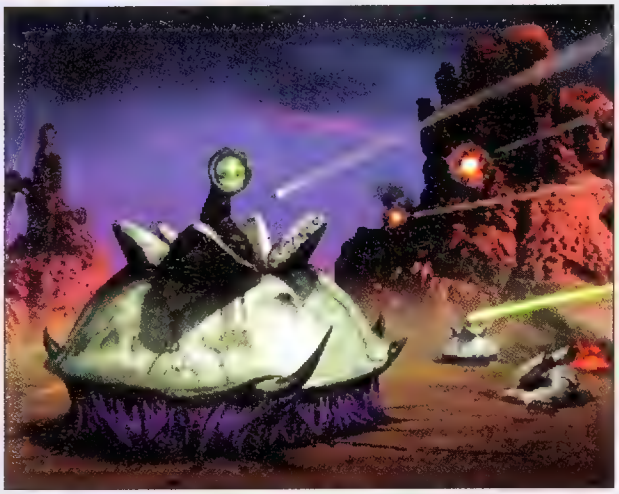


◀ The human interface and combat

An anti-aircraft unit from the alien forces pool ▼

Probably the biggest addition to the game is a real-time mode, complete with an optional "autopause" to help when combat gets too intense. Fortunately for those who enjoy a slower version of strategy, the turned-based and simultaneous modes from the original are still in the mix.

The graphics are improved, with the original tile-based terrain replaced with a rendered, 16-bit color model complete with elevations and obstacles. The top-down view is proportional, so units at higher elevations (closer to the "viewer") appear larger than those at lower positions, and the unique unlimited zoom feature remains from the first version. As in the original there is an abundance of units, with approximately 100 air, sea and ground units available in the final product, most with completely new features and abilities. The alien units are of bio-mechanical nature; some of the concept art for these units is stunning. Native units will appear on the planets too; these range from docile creatures that make great cannon fodder to nuisances which can harass and damage members of both sides.



One of the great features of the original was the easy-to use interface, and *M.A.X. II* improves on it. Redesigned visually with an alien-looking display, the interface has different appearances based on which side you command and can be customized as-needed by the player. The mini-map may be placed in different locations, buttons may be assigned to specific areas on the screen and the whole display can even be turned off so only the map is present. A new feature that should end up in the final version is a "spy-cam" which, when placed at various locations on the map, can be used to keep an eye on certain areas or units. Multiple cameras may be established and each view can be cycled to show current events in each specific area.

Gameplay should retain most of the features from the original, expanding and modifying some of the weak areas. Units will be able to take specific orders ranging from setting up a patrol to exploring or guarding an area. Multiple waypoints may be assigned and units can even be placed in repetitive loops when needed. The level of aggression can be programmed into units, setting them as passive or aggressive depending on how you wish to deploy them. The new construction option are impressive—a building queue may be set, allowing you to construct buildings in batches and freeing you to focus on more important areas. Finally, elaborate group movement options will enable players to direct groups of units and split them up to attack certain targets.

Multiplayer should be well-covered in this title, with six player LAN capability as well as modem and null-modem play. Internet play has not been finalized, but with IPX support it should run fine using KALI. Alliances will be a new multiplayer feature, allowing players to align with others and then gain their added views of the battlefield. Expected out in early 1998, *M.A.X. 2* looks to bring plenty of new features and improved graphics to the table when it enters the crowded strategy field. *–Jim Pedicord*

M.A.X. II • Interplay • Windows 95

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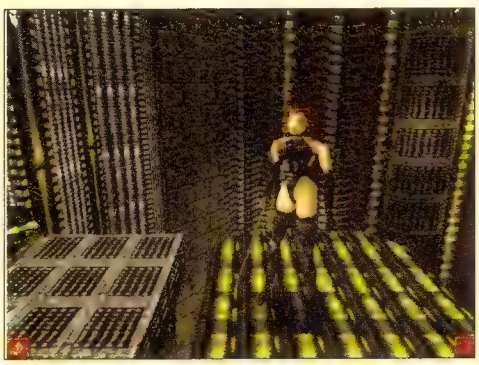
◀ Battle all manner of bizarre creatures throughout the torturous journey

Deathtrap Dungeon

Eidos heaves gore to the masses

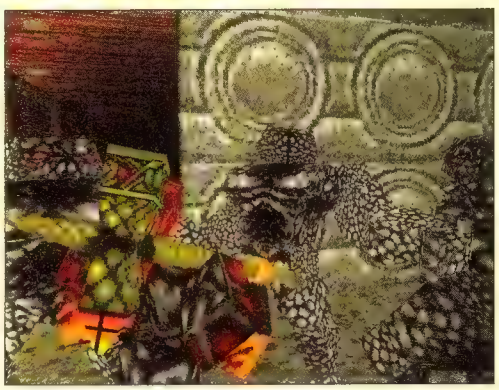
Brashly competing directly with Interplay's *Die by the Sword* [see page 74], and indirectly with their own *Tomb Raider 2*, Eidos' *Deathtrap Dungeon* is anything but a shy game. Based on the popular *Fighting Fantasy* books by Ian Livingstone (which reportedly have sold over 15 million copies worldwide), the game places the player in the blood-stained boots of either a scantily-clad female warrior or a stereotypical Conan-esque brawny male as they trounce evil monsters in a third-person 3D dungeon romp. Though Eidos has decided to put more clothes on the nipple- chain-wearing femme fatale heroine, she's still not wearing much, and the gobs of blood, gore and decapitations are taken to such a level they almost reach parody. In short, this is a pre-pubescent dream game.



◀ Behold! Eidos' new more politically correct heroine, now with one piece bathing suit

It's not a T-Rex, that was Tomb Raider... This is a Pit Fiend ▶

▼ There's no lack of up close and personal battles in Deathtrap Dungeon

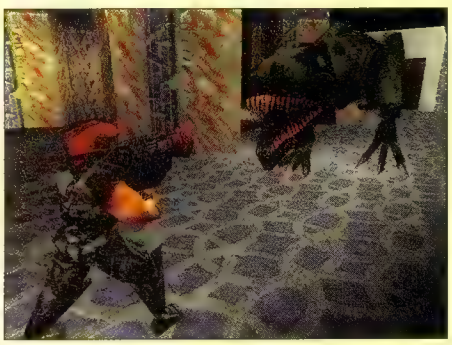


The graphics are more cartoony than either *Tomb Raider* or *Die by the Sword*, and the levels follow suit. Eidos plans for ten sizable main levels and ten sub-levels in the game, and they have a suitably gothic, spooky look and feel to them. Much of this is due to the lighting effects used, which like in *Tomb Raider* cuts off to darkness and shadowy effects enough to keep the ominous, danger lurking sort of feel. The architecture in the game is extremely varying as well—in both style and artistic integrity. There are ornate looking Gothic Cathedral-like structures, mixed with bizarrely blue and gaudy technological rooms, in addition to straightforward dungeon crawling as well. True to the game's name, the dungeon is endowed with, well, deathtraps. Pits, spikes, flamers, sudden monster ambushes and other devious forms of torture should keep players on their proverbial toes throughout the place. Additionally, expect plenty of teleport devices, keys, chests and switches to find.

The game will also have a whopping 55 different characters, which range from serpentine women to giant arachnids and reptiles, gleefully sadistic looking little trollies, killer clowns and other evil creations. The sheer variety of really bizarre creatures will likely keep gamers on their toes. And of course, if you hack them particularly hard (or not so hard, actually), their heads can fly off, and/or limbs will fly across the room in great swaths of blood.

As expected, the game will have a fairly interesting variety of weapons. Aside from the obvious magical swords and really big hammers, you'll find magic spells, bombs and even more "modern" weapons such as a blunderbuss and flame-thrower. , and players will encounter certain monsters that can only be hurt with the more powerful weapons.

One important aspect of the game is its multiplayer options, which helps distinguish it



from *Tomb Raider 2*. *Deathtrap Dungeon* will come equipped with a four player network mode (and a modem play option as well), though whether any sort of Internet play would be built-in was undetermined. According to Eidos, the game will only be supporting the standard deathmatch style of multiplayer, which is somewhat surprising in light of *Diablo*'s popular cooperative play. While the beta used for this preview is DOS-based, *Deathtrap Dungeon* should fully support Windows 95 and Direct3D upon its release. The game will also be optimized for specific cards, most notably those based on the 3Dfx chipset.

Deathtrap Dungeon was initially planned for a November release, which would have put it in direct competition with *Tomb Raider 2*. Due to delays with the PlayStation version, Eidos has decided to hold off until January and release both versions simultaneously, which could be perfect for action fans looking to kill something (or someone) after the holidays. *–Jason D'Aprile*

Deathtrap Dungeon • Eidos Interactive • Windows 95

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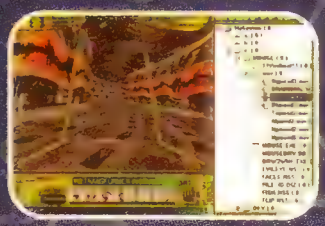

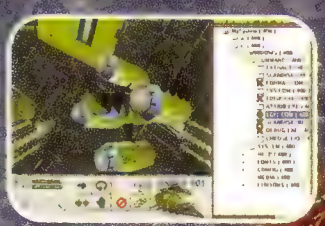

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Jagged Alliance II

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Down in the mines and down to one merc; who—or what—took out the rest of the team?

The original *Jagged Alliance* was notable because it had a lot of something many strategy games lack, namely personalities. Sure, tactical combat was the general emphasis of the game, but your troops weren't faceless digits. Instead, they were actual people; in addition to statistics they had quirks, in addition to skills they had histories. It added—*gasp!*—a role-playing element to a strategy game, one that ended up being well received. Perhaps it shouldn't have been surprising; not only did it make sense in game terms, but it came from Sirtech, the folks responsible for this little role-playing dynasty known as *Wizardry*.

Jagged Alliance was followed up by an intermediate product known as *Deadly Games*. While it added oft-requested multiplayer features, the game flow was different from the original. What Sirtech really needed was a product that combined features from both; with *Jagged Alliance II* it sounds like they'll have such a combination and a lot more as well.

The non-linear action of the original is back, but this time you're not taking control of an island, no sir! This time you have to free an entire nation with some 200 sectors, twelve towns, and eight underground mines. Control of all sectors isn't necessary to complete the game, but with that many areas replayability should be enhanced. Time is based on a real cycle so you'll have missions happening at night, and fatigue will be an important strategic factor. While some events are hard-coded into the game (set off by either player actions or time marks), others are randomized so you'll never know exactly when things will happen.

▲ **Faces only a commander could love**
▶ **The tropical terrain should bring back memories**

Your team can consist of up to 20 members although only six will be under direct player control at any one time. At the strategic level you can assign team members to activities or order them to different areas of the country (they can travel by foot or vehicle). While A.I.M. is still a source for team members, a new organization (M.E.R.C. —More Economic Recruiting Center) can supply cheaper soldiers of fortune; also, you can now hire some NPCs (non-player characters) encountered within tactical areas.

In fact, Sirtech is expanding the role-playing elements like NPCs greatly. Towns are populated with them; your team members can approach them, but be careful—the reputation of your force in general and each member in particular will carry across the nation, and people will react accordingly. Key NPCs will appear in random towns, another move to increase replayabilty. According to Sirtech, your own troops will have enhanced personalities and AI, and they are working to add character development (so that characters may change over the course of the game).

The tactical portion of the game will support either turn-based or real-time play (you chose which when you start the game). While turn-based sounds similar to the original (although there are some new elements, especially movement modes like climbing, crouched movement and crawling, etc.), real-time has the player actively controlling one merc while setting the AI stance for the others on the team (ordering them to, say, seek cover or act aggressively, conserve ammo, help teammates, etc). The game's speed will be adjustable, and you can form mercs into squads to better coordinate their activities.

The graphics have been pumped up to 16 bit color and 640x480 resolution. Team members will have different body types (females will be female, big guys will be big, etc.). Terrain objects will be 3D for accurate line-of-sight, and actual bullet velocities and penetration capabilities will be modeled, as will the characteristics of the substances they might encounter (hiding behind that wood wall may not be good enough if you're facing .50 cal fire!). Sirtech promises more weapons, both real-world ones (with characteristics modeled after the real things) and surprise devices; you will even be able to have weapons made for you. Vehicles have been introduced, but details on these are still sketchy, although Sirtech does say that your enemy's army will travel by road, rail, and air.

Multiplayer hasn't been forgotten, and Sirtech is planning several different forms. You play via modem, LAN, or Internet (no word on the total number of players). Multiplayer sessions can be closed turn-based or real-time team games or open real-time single character cooperative games.

And then there's the sci-fi element to the game, underlying what you think is your main battle. "Underlying" is the key; without spoiling things let's just say that those mines you can go into hold something more ominous than bats and Brown Recluse spiders. To quote the merc Larry Roachburn, "Man, I've seen some bad things, but I ain't never seen nothing like that. I'm gettin' the ...." Gamers will get to find out what he encountered sometime this Spring. *–Scott Udell*

Jagged Alliance II • Sirtech • Windows 95

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TELSTAR

Die by the Sword

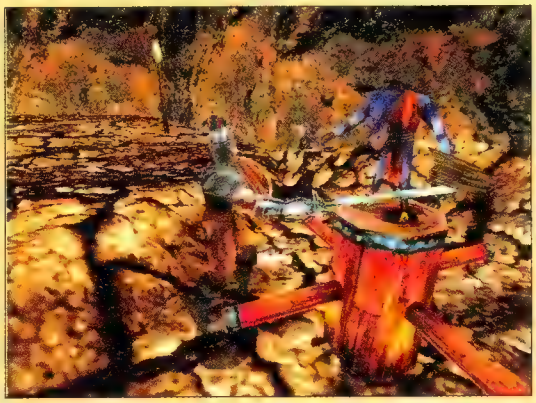
Interplay readies the latest dungeon romp

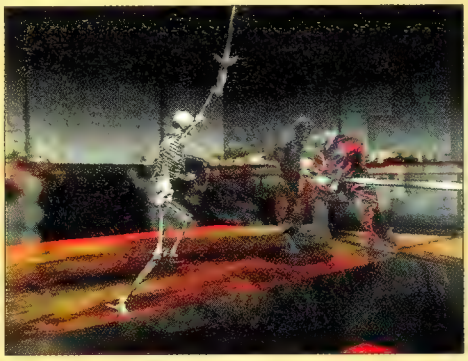
Face to face with an Ogre ▶

Dungeons are a time-honored staple of computer gaming. From classics like *Dragon's Lair* to recent hits such as *Diablo* and *Dungeon Keeper*, they've provided some of gaming's most memorable settings. The dark and mysterious nature of a dungeon brimming with nightmarish monsters and insidious little traps is a challenge that beckons most players and designers. Enter Interplay, readying gaming's next foray into the computerized underground with *Die by the Sword*.

In development for nearly two-and-a-half years by Treyarch, *Die by the Sword* is a combat adventure romp into the unknown. You are Enric, a stalwart warrior whose sister has been kidnapped mysteriously. Recovering her from the forces of evil will entail a journey into, you guessed it, a dungeon.

Using Treyarch's VSIM physics-based motion/control engine, *Die by the Sword* promises a technological leap forward in terms of fluid and realistic character motion. Rather than relying on traditional canned animation taken from motion-capture, VSIM (the letters don't actually stand for anything) creates a mathematical and physical model of the body. According to Interplay's Alan Barasch, this means Treyarch doesn't have to draw animations frame-by-frame. Rather, VSIM allows them to simulate the entire range of physical motion with just one model. Punch a Kobold in the face and watch his head snaps back as he's knocked off balance. Or, get caught in a rope trap and you'll have to battle the enemy while thrashing around like a fish on a line.





▲ Beware of back-stabing bones. A skeleton prepares to strike a busy hero

◀ A Kobold seizes the high ground

In fact, the VSIM engine is so versatile that it was used to animate the cutscenes, which Interplay says will feature foreshadowing events. After completing a level, players may then sit back and watch an Orc Captain battling a Mantis as a portent of things to come.

Graphically, the game is attractive, with large environments that feature volumetric lighting effects. Played either from a third- or first-person perspective, the action is fast and fluid. During combat, characters will display realistic damage and may even have limbs severed. Particularly gruesome (meaning the kids will love it) is the ability to continually hack away on an opponent's corpse. After chopping off an arm or a leg, the player can then pick up the discarded limb and use it as a club.

Die by the Sword will support 3D accelerators through both Direct3D and Glide. The build that ran on our 3Dfx-equipped Pentium II looked (naturally) impressive, but for those without that kind of horsepower, Interplay says the game will run on a 90MHz Pentium. Users will also be able to scale the resolutions, which should be necessary for those who haven't joined the 3D-accelerator bandwagon.

According to Barasch, control is best achieved through a keyboard or a mix of keyboard and mouse. Controlling your character's sword swings is extremely difficult at first, since there are an endless number of key combinations for virtually (no pun intended) any kind of swing. However, Barasch said that a move editor will allow players to create up to four different move combinations and assign them hotkeys. Players will even be able to trade their favorite combinations with their friends via the Internet.

The game will come with seven distinct levels, each featuring multiple paths and puzzles to success. For example, instead of battling their way onto a raft, players may choose to hide inside one of the crates that Kobolds are loading onto the raft. The AI will try to lure you into traps, such as when a wounded monster will lead you to a room with a rope trap. Monsters inhabiting the underworld range from the obligatory Dwarves and Orcs to the sleek Mantises and the undulating Tentacles.

In multiplayer mode, *Die by the Sword* will feature an arena where up to four players hack and bludgeon each other over a network. Players will also be able to go head-to-head over a modem. The game will support force feedback for things such as sword inertia and collisions.

Die by the Sword isn't due out until February, and until then Interplay and Treyarch are still tweaking some aspects of the game. In particular, some of the physics seem a bit iffy (with one leg chopped off, our armored hero could still jump in the air, flip, and land perfectly). However, if they can pull it off, gamers may just have to pull their torches out of storage and brace themselves for another jaunt into the digital underworld. *–Jason Ocampo*

Die by the Sword • Interplay • Windows 95

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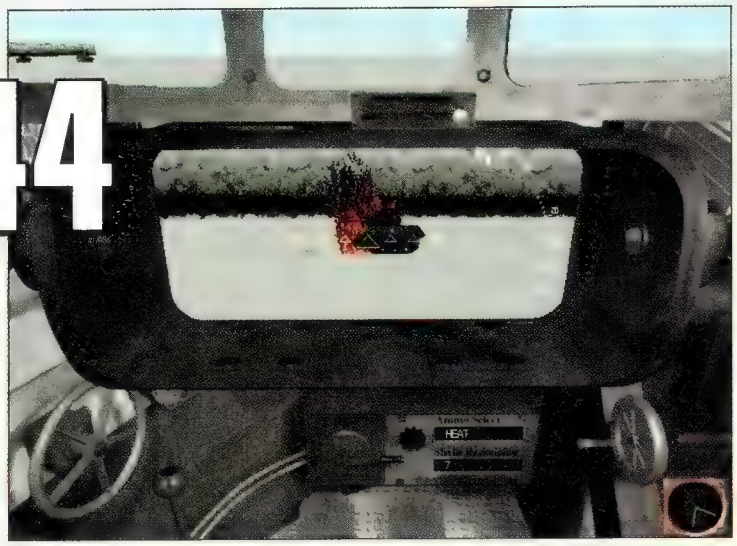
iPanzer '44

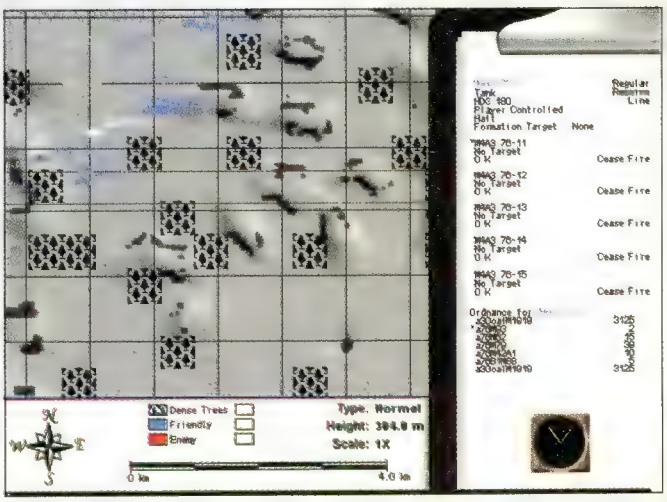
The Abrams engine goes back in time and into 3D



A Sherman takes a round from our Panther in this 3D-accelerated shot

What do you do if you put out a tank sim that gets a mixed reception? If you're Interactive Magic, the answer is go back and try again with another era. Earlier this year I-Magic released *iM1A2 Abrams*, the first real tank sim in years; while some lauded aspects of the sim, others decried it, especially for its graphics and representation of the battlefield. Particularly lacking, many felt, was support for 3D accelerator cards. While the merits and minuses of *iM1A2* can be argued until the armor comes home, I-Magic hasn't sat still; in addition to a 3D upgrade to *iM1A2*, they started work on *iPanzer '44*, a World War II tank sim they hope will fill a void in a sim sub-genre left empty since the release of the ill-conceived *Across the Rhine*.

iPanzer recreates armored actions on the Eastern and Western European fronts (no North Africa) during 1944 and early 1945. In addition to introductory and single missions gamers will face two different campaigns, playable from either side. In the East players can serve with either the Soviet 5th Guards Tank Army or the German 5th Panzer Division in Operation Bagration (or the Destruction of Army Group Center) in June 1944, while in the West the U.S. 2nd Armored and German 116th Panzer divisions face off during the Battle of the Bulge (December 1944).



▲ The map view with some symbology remnants from iM1-A2. Notice the box-shaped forest areas here...

... and from this exterior view; you can look into the forest areas and place infantry in them, but tanks are blocked. A few individual trees, like the one in the foreground, will soften the hard boundaries of the actual forest areas ▶

Playing different sides means simulating different tanks, something new to the series. *iPanzer* has you controlling the M4A3-76 HVSS Sherman for the Americans, the T-34/85 for the Soviets, or the PzKw Mk VG Panther for the Germans. For each tank the "primary" positions are recreated: driver, gunner, and commander. As with *iM1-A2* you can also select outside views, jump to other tanks within your platoon, or view (again from the outside) the scenery from the perspective of other kinds of vehicles under your command. You may choose to play as a commander of a single vehicle, a platoon (three to five tanks), or a company commander with other types of vehicles under your command (these supporting units will change across time, so the mix of vehicles you'll command will be different).

From a gaming perspective, anyone who's played *iM1A2* should be able to jump right into *iPanzer*—the control scheme in the alpha build we looked at is virtually identical. Of course, this is tank technology from 50 years ago, so tactics will be quite a bit different, especially in the close-in confines of the Ardennes.

Graphically, I-Magic has added 16 bit color and 3D acceleration support; they claim a jump from seven frames per second (FPS) to over 20 on standard machines, and our Pentium II with a 3Dfx card ran the alpha at over 30 FPS in some instances. Interactive Magic's Dave Murray says the terrain shown in the screenshots is pretty close to final, although they will be adding more objects to the battlefield. Conspicuously missing from *iM1A2* was any significant vegetative cover; recognizing this would be completely unacceptable for most West Front battles, I-Magic has come up with a system of box-shaped forested areas. Tanks will not be able to enter these areas (which seem almost like forest "buildings"), but gamers can see inside them and infantry can be moved into—and fire from within—such zones. They'll also add some individual trees around the fringes of these forest boxes to help soften their sharp edges, but players shouldn't expect 3D forests like those encountered in *Terra Nova*.

iPanzer '44 faces stiff competition for the attention of tank sim enthusiasts. Gamers are already eyeing the likes of MicroProse's *M1 Tank Platoon II* and, in particular, SSI's *Panzer Commander* (which may have up to three driveable tanks *per side*); it will be interesting to see how I-Magic responds to these challengers as they work through the final months of development. *–Scott Udell*

iPanzer '44 • Interactive Magic • Windows 95

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Over the Net

WorldPlay: We're baaaaack!

The computer gaming industry in general is particularly cyclical. Every few years you see a wave of new start-ups, flush with cash and talent from a recent boom in computer entertainment products. (Occasionally these start-ups also come from larger companies that have just gone belly up.) A few years pass, and then you hit the downside of the cycle. Weaker companies go under, and the vast majority of the survivors are acquired by larger, increasingly monolithic companies. (Quick — how many independent game companies can *you* name?)

If we look at the cyclical nature of the gaming industry as a whole, then, it's not much of a stretch to see the same cycle occurring to the *online* gaming industry. And indeed, the entire online gaming industry is going through once such cycle right now (sadly, on the downswing end). However, one company seems to be breaking out of that slump and appears to have a bright future—at least, as bright as can be expected considering the current state of online gaming. That company? WorldPlay Entertainment.

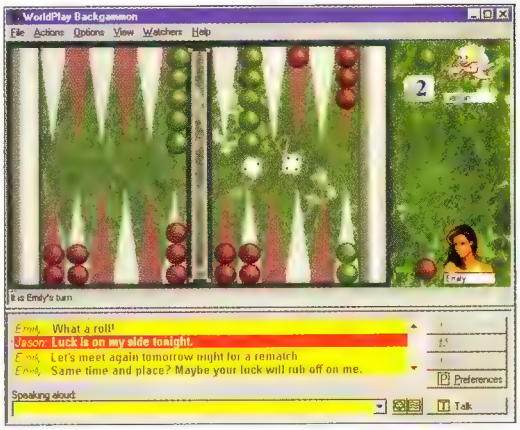
What's that? Never heard of them?

Sure you have. You just don't know it yet.

WorldPlay Entertainment started life back in the late 80's as The Sierra Network (TSN). As some of you might recall, TSN was a proprietary dial-up network that Sierra created as one of the first serious attempts at building a pay-to-play online gaming network and community. Game content was supplied by Sierra and included card games, board games, and a couple of higher-end titles such as *Red Baron*, a World War I air combat simulation. Unfortunately, this dependence on Sierra-only content ultimately hurt TSN; consumers (what few there were) wanted more selection, and even when TSN changed its Sierra-only content policy, outside companies were wary of working with a service so closely tied to Sierra. In the end, it looked as though TSN arrived on the scene a little too early. There weren't enough people with modems at the time, and most users thought the cost was too high—especially for what was basically a simple board game and chat service.

Sierra worked hard at trying to make TSN a success, but eventually grew tired of losing money on the service. In the early 90's Sierra sold TSN to AT&T, who promptly renamed it The Imagination Network. AT&T had grand visions for the online space, and hoped to tie in some of Imagination's assets to the new Interchange online service they were building. Under AT&T's tutelage and supervision, Imagination began moving the old proprietary backend (originally running on 6 386/33 MHz machines, believe it or not) to Unix-based systems. This move was key to Imagination's future success, as it gave them a much more scalable system—and, coincidentally enough, a system that was perfectly-suited for use on a just-emerging phenomenon we now call the Internet.

Well, as is relatively common with AT&T, the internal management had a vision-shift in the mid-nineties and decided that AT&T no longer wanted to be in the online service business. (We're talking about online services with content; not ISP service such as AT&T's WorldNet.) Their internal Interchange network was canceled (after millions of dollars of development), and AT&T began looking for buyers for Imagination. To make a long story short, in August of 1996 America Online purchased The Imagination Network and turned it into a wholly-owned subsidiary of AOL Studios.


WorldPlay Backgammon
File Actions Options View Watchers Help
2
It is Emily's turn
What a roll!
Luck is on my side tonight.
Let's meet again tomorrow night for a rematch
Same time and place? Maybe your luck will rub off on me.
Preferences
Speaking aloud
Talk

WorldPlay's current content line-up is somewhat weak with only "classic" games such as Spades and Backgammon available . . .

. . . but future titles such as Warcraft II promise to begin drawing in more hardcore gamers

This is where it gets interesting. For years now the many other online services have been watching AOL warily. AOL was the great, 800-pound sleeping gorilla, and everyone was worried about what AOL would do once it awoke to the huge opportunities in online gaming.

On June 17, 1997 they got their answer. Through a series of announcements at E3, several interesting facts were brought to light. First, The Imagination Network was changing its name (yep, yet again) to WorldPlay Entertainment. The name shift reflected a major strategy change for the company. Instead of being a proprietary games network, WorldPlay was revamping its business model to become an aggregator of quality online content, and then selling access to that content. On top of the name change and business shift announcements, WorldPlay also announced that it was now the primary programmer for premium games on AOL (giving the already-floundering Engage Games Online a serious body-blow). Finally, WorldPlay announced distribution deals for its content with AT&T's WorldNet service and Earthlink.

With these announcements, AOL suddenly became a major player in the online gaming space. It could woo developers with its huge membership base of potential gamers, and was also able to hedge its bets by deriving income from the other WorldPlay content licensees.

So was this a death blow to the fledgling online gaming services? Eh . . . probably not for most. It definitely hurt Engage, who was one of the first companies to see the advantages of going *to* the subscribers, instead of trying to recruit them. Industry rumors say Engage and WorldPlay had some pretty titanic battles over who got control of the AOL Games channel; obviously WorldPlay won out (probably due to being owned by AOL), forcing Engage to sublicense their content to them. In Engage's defense, however, it's worth pointing out that their business model was solid up until AOL/WorldPlay decided to get in the game (ironically, with the same model). Once that happened, AOL simply made the better business choice and pretty much cut out the middleman.

Besides Engage, however, the other online gaming services still have a fighting chance. Although WorldPlay's strategy is sound, they definitely do have some hurdles to overcome.

For one, although WorldPlay has access to millions of potential users thanks to its ties with AOL, it also gets forced to deal with some pretty ugly baggage. AOL isn't the

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You can visit different themed areas in CyberPark, ranging from a rather DMV-looking Community Center . . .

. . . to a virtual nightclub called The Zone. A somewhat ironic name, considering Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone

fastest network, and its latency is often a killer. In fact, rumors have it that WorldPlay was trying to work out some way to allow AOL gamers to connect directly to their servers, bypassing the AOL network cloud completely. Unfortunately, this got nixed since AOL needed to keep a connection up for billing reasons. Because of these issues, Engage was very careful to try to only bring latency-tolerant content to its network; now WorldPlay has the same issues to deal with, and may lose out on quite a few premium titles because of it.

Another challenge WorldPlay has to deal with is how to launch their service with its current content. If you visit the WorldPlay area on AOL today (keyword: worldplay) you'll see a great deal of repackaged Sierra Network content, including Bridge, Backgammon, Spades, and other assorted card and board games. Although WorldPlay doesn't try to call this premium content, it *is* still the vast majority of titles currently available for play.

What about the current premium content (which you have to pay a $1.99 surcharge to access)? There's still not that much — in fact, technically as of this writing there's none, since all of the premium content is actually from the Engage sublicense. Thanks to Engage, WorldPlay can offer *Castles II*, *Rolemaster: Magestorm*, *SplatterBall*, *Virtual Pool*, and *Warcraft II* (although *Warcraft II* is coming soon). Admittedly, several of these games are excellent (especially *Warcraft II*)—but, they're also relatively old, and I don't think there's a large audience willing to pay to play them.

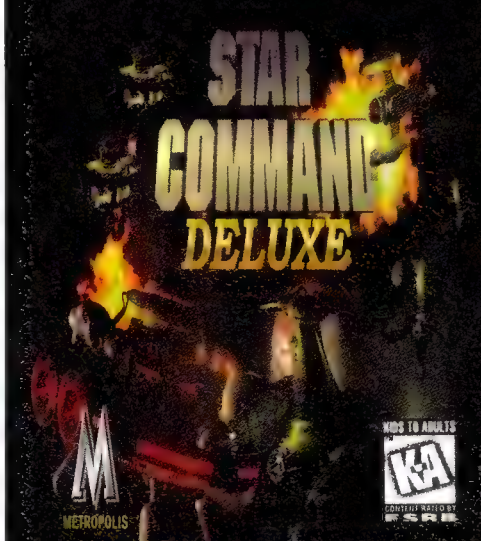
However, the *future* content on WorldPlay looks quite bright. New content is being built from the ground up to be latency-tolerant, and several licenses should prove to be quite lucrative. For one, WorldPlay owns the exclusive *online* rights to *Tetris*, and hopes to bring a multi-player version of the game to the network soon. *Tetris* is one of the rare crossover titles that both men and women seem to like equally; as such, it could prove to be an introduction to online gaming for a new demographic. In addition, future games include *MissionForce: CyberStorm* (yet another 'mech game), *Fantasy Adventures Online* (an online fantasy card game, much like *Magic: The Gathering*), *The Incredible Machine v3.0* (one of the ultimate Rube Goldberg-like puzzle games), and finally, *Shattered Light* (a large-scale online role-playing game).

In addition to these games, WorldPlay is also working on adding a 3D interface called *CyberPark*. *CyberPark* is a 3D virtual world that allows users to explore a large themed environment, chat with other players, and eventually, attend programmed events. However, there are questions as to how effective *CyberPark* will be. The last time I saw the engine (admittedly months ago) it struck me as being relatively slow, and somewhat dated. In addition, I know quite a few people who question just how fun it's going to be to "physically" walk to different virtual locations when all you really want is to *do* something — such as play a game. Hopefully some sort of keyword or hotkey system will allow users to quick-jump throughout the world.

All-in-all, WorldPlay probably has quite a bright future ahead of it. By effectively co-opting Engage's business model, it has all of the potential subscribers it could want, and although currently content-weak, future titles look as though they have a great deal of potential. Time will only tell whether users will be willing to pay an additional $1.99 per hour to play games on AOL. My guess is that WorldPlay is going struggle at first, but as more compelling content becomes available, users will be more likely to pony up the cash.

In addition, latency issues do definitely handicap WorldPlay's attempts to offer some higher-end titles, but time and technology advances will eventually help iron this out. Don't be surprised if at some point in the next few years you begin to see companies like TEN and Mpath becoming channels on AOL—remember, it's a cyclical business, and most of these companies have a couple more business models to try out before calling it quits! –*André Vrignaud*

André Vrignaud has worked in the computer gaming industry since 1990, although he admits the Atari 2600 had a great influence on his formative years well before then. Most recently he's worked at SSI and TEN, where he produced much of their online content and direction. He is always interested in stimulating, albeit inflammable, email (including rumors, tips, and other random trivia) and can be reached at overthenet@cdmag.com.



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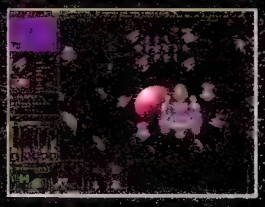

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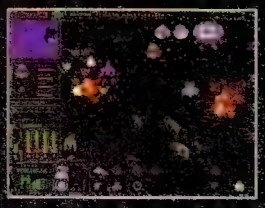

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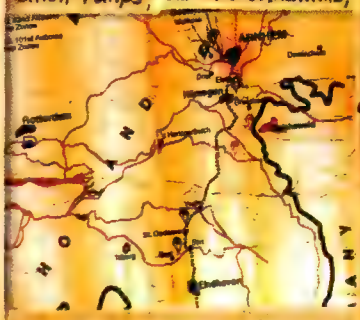
Getting yourself your men surrounded is very bad for morale.

To do in Holland:

Smell tulips, admire windmills,



secure bridgeheads.

"Look ol' boy, ignore everything I say and you'll do smashingly."

mortar or flamethrowers... mortar or flamethrowers...

Unless of course you want to win.

You took the bridge yesterday. That doesn't mean you'll have it today.

Nothing cleans out a town quite like flamethrowers.

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Command Post

More roaring mice

A couple of months back, I wrote about some small wargame publishers (the "mice" of the title line) – little guys who put out some big effort. There were a couple of things I didn't have space for, and a one product I've learned of since then, so I thought I'd revisit the subject.

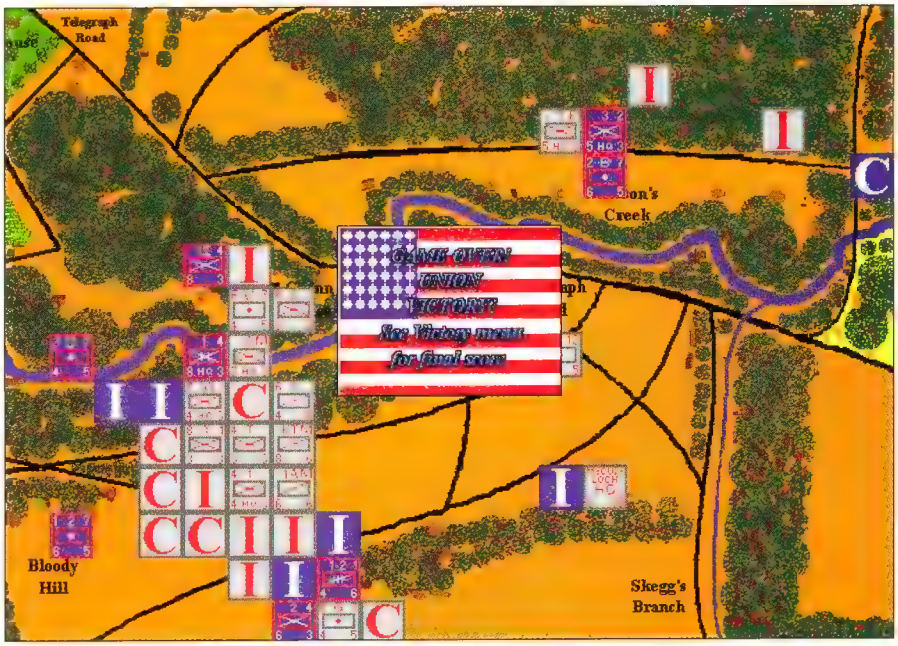
Not a game but certainly of interest to HPS aficionados is HPS' *Encyclopedia of Land Combat, Volume 1: World War II (1936-1945) Europe, North Africa, China, and the Pacific*, by Scott Hamilton and Gregory Smith. Okay, so the title's a little ungainly, but it's the contents that count, and they should count big. This 180+ page book is basically a reference listing every type of land (with some naval and air, apparently if they were involved in land actions) vehicle and weapon in the HPS games. While the systems included may all be in one HPS game or another, this book is not specifically a guide to their games – anyone playing tactical-level World War II game (*Steel Panthers* comes to mind) or just plain interested in the subject should find the book useful.

The book is broken into 14 nation/nation-group sections, then further subdivided into categories such as light tanks, flamethrower vehicles, mortars, reconnaissance, personnel, cargo, and more. Each entry ranges from a couple of paragraphs down to a couple of sentences (for some variants and minor items). Some entries have graphics, either line-art or fuzzy photographs (Smith reports there was a goof-up at the printers). There's a lot in here, from the expected (Panthers) to the obscure (Japanese KE-HO type 5). At $25 this soft- and spiral-bound book is a tad pricey, but for the information contained gamers should still find it worthwhile. (HPS can be contacted at www.hpssims.com, 408-554-8381, or P.O. Box 3245, Santa Clara, CA 95055-3245.)

Months ago a reader asked me what I thought about the wargames from Target Auctions, and I had to admit I'd never heard of them. He passed on their web site's URL (www.usbusiness.com/target/us.htm) and I went to check it out. It turns out they have several little wargames from the Civil War period; one, *Tattered Flags*, is a generic Civil War game (no particular battle), but the other three cover rarely gamed battles from the Trans-Mississippi region: *Lexington, Missouri*, *Pea Ridge*, and *Wilson's Creek* (actually, I've counted four computer games that include Wilson's Creek in some form – more recreations of the battle than the boardgame community has).

I ordered *Wilson's Creek*, and, while I've yet to really dig into it, it is interesting (and covers a battle I, for some reason, am fascinated with). The production values are pretty low on the scale: relatively crude graphics, a weak interface, poor documentation that is built into the game (not even a help file), few if any modern computer wargame conventions (no hidden units, for example), and quirky execution (the game has to run in 640x480, but doesn't tell you this; if you load it in a higher res the game executes but suffers from graphics glitches and crashes). The incidental sound effects are nice, even if they play at some unexpected times. There are a some big gameplay glitches; aside from the aforementioned quirky interface, units can sometimes disappear under others (I think I once lost a unit this way), and destroyed units leave markers on the battlefield that appear to block movement.

Despite the flaws, it's a fun enough little game, and the price is right: all the games in the series are now $14.95. The biggest draw, however, are the battles they model; some collectors might want them if only for their rarity in both computer and board wargaming. Aside from their web site, you can reach Target Auctions at target_y@usa.pipeline.com, 816-965-0013, or at P.O. Box 17841, Kansas City, MO, 64134.



[from top to bottom]

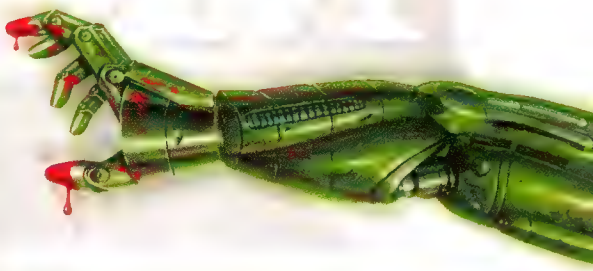
Target Auction's Wilson's Creek; sure, it was a victory for me, but at great cost to both sides (the "I" and "C" markers represent destroyed units... and this is just in one section of the battlefield)

Mac gamers will get to line up at Ligny, care of ...by Design, Inc

Macintosh wargamers can look forward to another visit to Waterloo... and Ligny, Quatre-Bras, and Wavre, all care of ...by Design, Inc., the creators of the *Musket Fire* and *Cannon Fire* games. ....by Design's Owen Gwynne tells us that this is a new game covering the entire Waterloo campaign; while you can fight battles as individual scenarios you can also play them in a linked campaign, with carry-over from battle to battle (so, if you foolishly lose the Old Guard early on you won't have them for Waterloo). They are working on a rewrite of their AI engine, and plan some interface/gameplay improvements as well (for example, you'll be able to select multiple units and move them at once, so advancing a line should be much less tedious). Plans are for the game to be out by the holidays. Interested gamers can contact ...by Design at 800-527-7472 or DesignInc@aol.com. *–Scott Udell*

~~heroin~~
~~s & m~~
~~unfiltered cigs~~
~~binge drinking~~
~~creamed corn~~
~~one night stands~~

hell, what's left?



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RP

ESRB

IF HELICOPTERS FAIL.

BRING IN THE NEGOTIATION TEAM.

On War

Conducting the movement to contact

The Task Force (TF) moves forward until enemy contact is made. At this point, the movement to contact evolves into a Meeting Engagement. The goal, once contact is made, is to overwhelm the enemy force before it can react to our presence. Avoid a piecemeal commitment of your force against the enemy force.

The unit which makes contact (hopefully the scouts) deploys, reports, and develops the situation. The scouts maneuver to determine the size and activity of the enemy force and avoid being decisively engaged. If the enemy is stationary, they determine if his positions are prepared and if mines and other obstacles have been emplaced. They look for enemy weapon positions, flanks, and gaps. However, they must ensure gaps do not lead into enemy kill zones.

There are several possibilities when contact is made: the enemy might be surprised and not aware of our presence (sadly lacking in wargames), moving, stopped in unprepared positions, or stopped in prepared positions. Commanders have several options in these cases: bypass, hasty attack, deliberate attack, hasty defense, or hasty ambush. This month we will cover the bypass and the hasty attack.

Bypass

This is only an option if the force is small, perhaps less than a company. It is seldom a good idea in a wargame. **Figure 1** shows a scout platoon screening an enemy position while the rest of the TF bypasses. If the force is sufficiently small, then the TF fixes the enemy until it is clear. The fixing force must stay in position until it is relieved by follow on forces.

Hasty attack

A hasty attack may be launched directly from the line of march, particularly if the enemy is unaware of our presence, or after a short preparation to find out where the enemy is. If against a moving enemy, the TF deploys with the scouts forward to develop the situation, attacks mounted with tanks and personnel carriers, with overwatching units, and employs FASCAM, smoke, and other artillery fires to disrupt and isolate the enemy force and protect the friendly force.

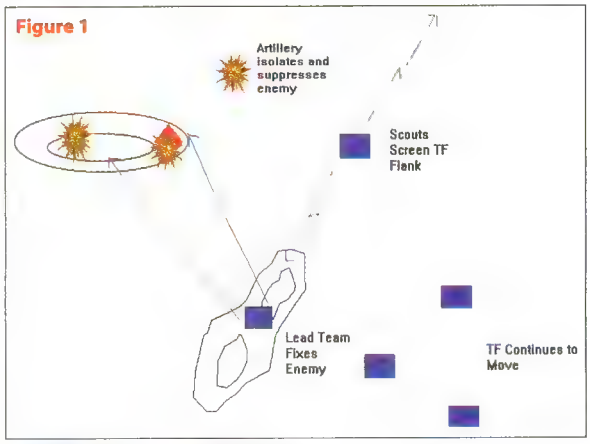
Figure 2 shows a hasty attack against a moving enemy: The lead tank team has assumed the hasty defense in order to fix the enemy. The second team has deployed and seized high ground to the enemy flank to provide overwatch and flank security while the scouts continue to move forward and cover potential enemy attack routes into the TF area. Finally, the trail teams move to attack the enemy. They may close and assault the enemy force or attack by fire. Artillery is fired to block enemy approaches at choke points and to suppress enemy overwatching units.

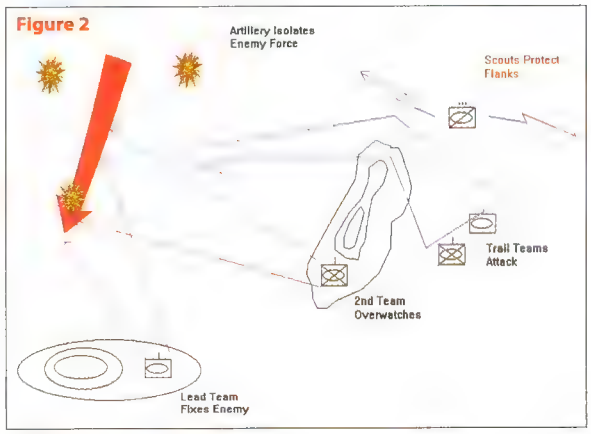
Figure 3 shows a hasty attack against a defending enemy. If the enemy is weak or the operation requires continuous forward movement, then a hasty attack must be launched. Normally, a flank attack is preferred to a frontal attack, due to the high proportion of OPFOR anti-tank fires at all levels of organization.

Fire and maneuver is used in order to suppress the OPFOR and maintain forward movement of the TF. One or more elements fire on the enemy while other elements of the TF move forward in order to place more effective fires on the enemy or to assault him. The maneuvering teams use a covered approach into the enemy rear, frequently preceded by the scout platoon. Care must be taken in these cases to ensure the TF does not blunder into an enemy kill zone.

When conducting a hasty attack two things must be avoided: committing the TF without understanding the situation or committing the TF piecemeal. The biggest problem US units face at the National Training Center or during simulation exercises is failing to mass fires and units on enemy units. For this reason, the TF masses its fires on only one or two platoons. A company attacks only one or two unsupported vehicles. In World War I, Rommel, as a company commander, frequently contrived to direct the fire of an entire regiment onto a position to support the maneuver and penetration of a single squad. Once that squad gained access to the enemy defensive work, additional forces enlarged the penetration.

Because of their vulnerability to enemy anti-tank fires, infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) should not generally accompany the assault. They halt at the last covered and concealed position, discharge their infantry, and support by fire. If fire is sufficiently weak, they can dismount infantry on or beyond the objective. When sweeping the objective, IFVs traverse the friendly side of the objective while tanks sweep the enemy side, in order to best protect the unit. *–Michael K. Robel*





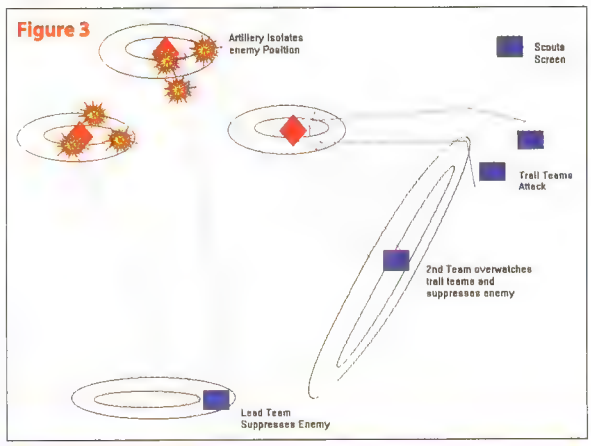
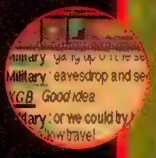


Figure 1: The bypass
Figure 2: A hasty attack against a moving enemy
Figure 3: A hasty attack against a defending enemy

Boris Yeltsin dies.

KGB makes Peoria man disappear.

Who will they *delete* next?



Heritage is will be a Russian Nationalist in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Or a Russian General in Tarrow, Florida...

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Far Out

survival is a trip...

Age of Empires

Microsoft's Mesopotamian marvel

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

For the last year and more, real-time strategy games have flooded store shelves. Gamers can't turn around without encountering yet another take on the tried and true *Command & Conquer/Warcraft* theme. Some of these games are merely wretched knock-offs of the inspired originals. Some are quite original, but woefully unfinished, unpolished, or otherwise poorly developed. Most are competent, if uninspired, derivative without being distinctive. Then, there are the true gems of this group, games that merge familiar concepts with brilliant execution. Microsoft's *Age of Empires* is such a game.

On one level, *Age of Empires* is simply a real-time strategy game (like *Warcraft II*) with Assyrians and Babylonians instead of orcs or aliens. Gameplay will be instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with the genre. Each player has a group of units, ranging from basic builders to powerful warriors, and a host of structures ranging from humble houses to towering temples. Starting with but a few lowly units, players gather resources and research technologies, all the while building up power and increasing their numbers. A click-and-drag movement lassos a group of units; a right click sends them off to battle. Up to eight players can struggle for dominance, including over the Internet, and custom maps and scenarios are of course supported as well. So far, so – familiar, if not boring.

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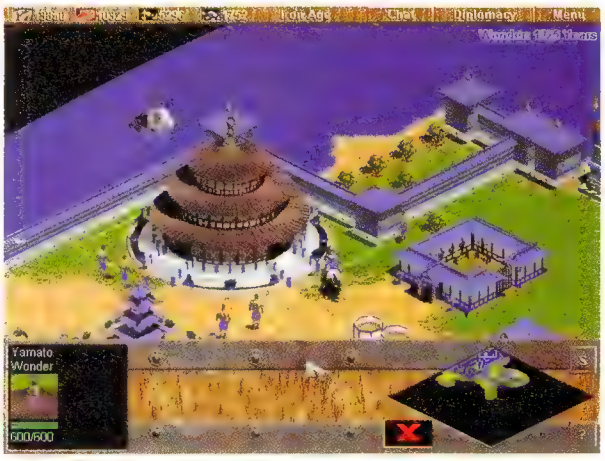
The easy way to build a Wonder – use the editor

Death on a rocky shore – but the priceless Artifact is worth the cost

Build a wonder, it'll do wonders for your score



Yet, on another level, *Age of Empires* is much more than the sum of its parts. The single most compelling aspect of this game is its feel, its atmosphere. Instead of science-fiction, or fantasy, the game draws on ancient history for its inspiration. No, this is not a serious historical simulation, but there is real history in the details that make up each civilization. There are twelve different "empires" to chose from –itself a significant leap beyond the normal two or four – and each one is actually, meaningfully different. Each civilization has its own strengths and weaknesses, loosely based on their historical characteristics: the Assyrians field a mighty army, the Phoenicians a powerful navy, the Persians hosts of elephants. The civilizations differ in economic and technological terms as well, with some boasting better farming and others faster villagers, for instance. With the default technology tree in place, each civilization also has its own, unique research path. One will develop the most powerful ships, but never get the best archers. Another might aspire to powerful Legion infantry, but be sorely lacking in cavalry, while yet another might be ignorant of siege craft but be blessed with extremely effective holy men. Winning with the Hittites, then, requires a very different strategy than winning with Yamato. Even the interface screen changes a bit to reflect the different cultures in play.

Ensemble Studios has done a good job in making each civilization look different as well as act different. Basic structures for all empires are identical in the Stone Age, where most games begin, but at each successive Age (Tool, Bronze, Iron) the buildings take on unique aspects. By the time players are well into the game, each side looks different enough that the fiction of controlling distinct civilizations is maintained. Other visual touches are spot-on as well. The gradual deforestation of the land is marked by tree stumps littering the plains, while beasts slain by hunters gradually decay into bleached skeletons to dot the landscape. There are several types of trees (with differing values as sources of lumber), four types of animals (not including the birds that soar overhead), fish, and whales which can be harvested, along with gold and stone. The world map, though smallish by imperial standards, is nicely contoured, with hills, cliffs, and beaches. Elevation matters in combat, and units move faster going downhill than uphill. The overall look of the game is thus very detailed, and very satisfying. A full-featured editor is included, so custom scenarios should be ubiquitous with time.

While the mechanics of *Age of Empires* are simple, the underlying structure is a bit more complex. In a random game, the most common sort of contest for the solo gamer, each civilization begins with three villagers (the

only units which can actually build) and a town center. Each center supports up to four units, and each house built thereafter supports an additional four units, up to the maximum of 50 units a side (more or less). Each villager costs a certain amount of food, while combat units cost various combinations of food, wood, or gold. Every civilization can build the basics, but advanced structures depend on the culture's specific technology tree, and some cultures get bonuses unique to them. Where *Age of Empires* shines is in the diversity and detail of its units. Depending on the allowed technologies, a civilization might develop multiple variations of siege engines, archers, infantry and cavalry units. As each civilization has different abilities, and no two are precisely alike, this assures that combat between players will likely also be combat between opposing tactical systems. Some units, like priests, offer capabilities that, if not unique (see *M.A.X.*'s infiltrators, for example) are unusual and extraordinarily well thought out. Priests can convert enemy units, breaking up attacks and providing free augmentation to the recruiter's intake (and unlike new construction, these conversions can occur regardless of how much housing a player has). Players can even upgrade priests, with things like Monotheism, Fanaticism, and the Astrology, adding a fairly unique dimension to the game.

Okay, Okay; so far, despite the details, this still seems a lot like *Warcraft 2.5: The History Lesson*, but the feel of the game is much different. From the CD-audio soundtrack (a cross between Peter Gabriel's *Passion* and something David Bowie and Brian Eno might cook up) to the excellent manual, the game carves out its own niche. Players can win in multiple ways: conquest, capturing ruins and artifacts, points, building Wonders. Team play is supported in several ways, with true cooperative play (multiple players controlling one civilization) being possible as well. Internet play is integrated into Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone, though it's also possible via any sort of Direct Connect connection. The computer players are mean and sneaky at least, if not astoundingly bright. The random maps churn out a healthy variety of geographical layouts, with some provision for user input (coastal, inland, islands), and the canned scenarios and campaigns are imaginative. There are four campaigns, including an excellent tutorial sequence, which span various cultures and eras. While not true linked scenarios, these campaigns are well-designed and interesting for the solo player. The random games are more fun in the long run, but the campaigns are interesting diversions. The number of multiplayer scenarios, 24, is impressive as well, particularly as random maps and deathmatch games (everyone starts with oodles of resources) are supported too. Another welcome feature is that all the multiplayer scenarios can be played solo, with the computer filling in for missing humans. Up to three players can play using one CD, up to six with two; the full eight player game requires three CDs.

Basically, this game takes an established, proven concept and develops it into an inspired product. There is no real reason, on paper, why the game should be this good. Playing it, however, proves to be addictive. Even abject defeat engenders not frustration but a burning desire to try again. Say what you will, Microsoft knows how to support its developers; the level of testing (including a semi-public beta test), quality assurance, and support for this game really shows. It's a polished product, one where the betas were almost solid enough for many other companies to release. It isn't flawless, by any means. Players expecting a serious historical sim will be disappointed. It's really tactical combat mated with a strategic resource engine, not a true "strategy" game by the strictest wargamer's definition. Units sometimes do things that are pretty dumb, and don't react quite as intelligently as they could. There could be more variety in the randomly-generated terrain, and the lack of a truly dynamic campaign is a minus. Most of all, unit AI needs work, as too often units simply ignore enemies only a few pixels away; units also have a hard time moving through narrow passages. Nothing is perfect, and *Age of Empires* is no exception.

[top to bottom]

A well-developed Sumerian civilization

We have a winner!

Come on baby light my fire

When it comes down to it, though, this game simply does not have any serious flaws. It is beautifully designed, skillfully executed, attractively packaged, and a hell of a lot of fun to play. Gamers who don't normally like real-time games should be pleased with slower pace of *Age of Empires* (speed is adjustable, of course). Gamers with an interest in history, and no aversion to a rather abstract rendition of same, should love the atmosphere and feel of the game. And anyone who appreciates a solid, lovingly-crafted work of design should appreciate the overall quality of this product. Ensemble and Microsoft have delivered a masterpiece, a game no one should scratch off their list without a good, close look. *–Robert Mayer*

★★★★★

Age of Empires

Microsoft • www.microsoft.com • Requirements: Windows 95, NT 4.0, 90 MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial

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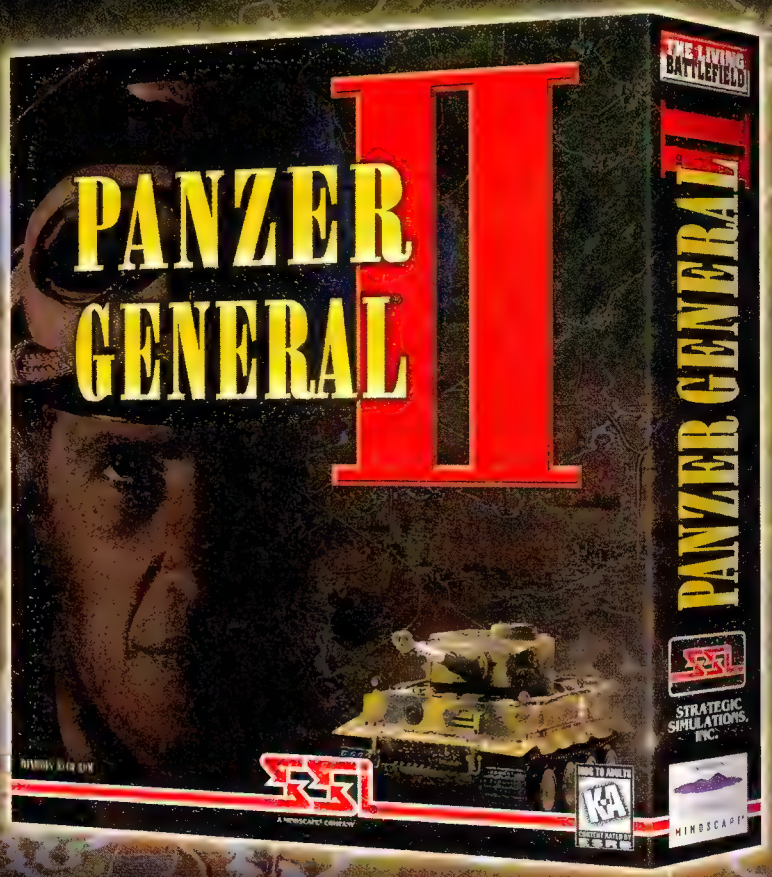

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Dark Reign

The rush to multiplayer continues

The year of the real-time strategy game is finally in full swing. With the summer releases coming out late, gamers have recently been bombarded by these games. Like the *Doom*-clone era, real innovation has been scarce; minor improvements upon earlier releases has become the common theme. Activision's *Dark Reign: The Future of War* weighs in as a game with a lot to offer, but with significant weaknesses that keep it from shining above its competitors.

Graphically, *Dark Reign* doesn't offer much that we haven't already seen. Video clips are scattered (thinly) throughout the game, but there are so few of them they appear to be little more than tokens. The units look decent and the terrain is nice, but again it's not anything that hasn't been done before. A few new ideas stick out, though; one nice feature is the addition of terrain elevations. Sadly, the perspective is so close to being vertical that it's hard to make out where the hills are, giving the game a somewhat two-dimensional feel. At times the only way to tell there is a hill is because it's blocking the line of sight of your units.

[top to bottom]

Infantry can hide under foliage

An artificial earthquake rumbles through the enemy base

Sky Fortresses—expensive, but your opponent will hate them

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the terrain is the use of trees. Units can slip under the canopy of a dense forest, disappearing from an opponent's sight. Also, different kinds of terrain affect the units in different ways. Wheeled vehicles get bogged down in mud, and cliffs can be scaled only by infantry. A water-dominant map makes the use of hover craft crucial and maps full of cliffs make infantry an essential unit. This allows a great deal of variation in the strategy from map to map, which is quite refreshing.

Back when *Dune II* came out, people said "Wow, I wish this game had multiplayer;" now the same folks are wishing games had better single player qualities. The rush has definitely been to network and Internet play, which is sad because most people only have dial-up Internet connections and no local area network access at all. With *Dark Reign*, Activision has followed the crowd; the single player game seems to be little more than a training session for multiplayer.

One nice feature of single-player is the tutorial. The player has the option of playing a couple introductory missions in which all the features of the game are made clear. (This is especially nice for those of us who consider the manual a last resort.) Once the tutorial is finished, though, the single player game goes steeply downhill. The plot line is weak, to put it mildly. The premise is a war between the evil Imperium and the small but resilient Freedom Guard. Before each single-player mission is a short briefing saying how the battle fits in with the general scheme of things, but one mission is completely unrelated to the next. The single player outlook goes from bad to worse when we see that there are only 12 missions for each side.

On the other hand, those few missions were more than enough after experiencing the lack of innovation in the game's artificial intelligence. Apparently the computer's favorite strategy is to try to irk the player into submission by annoying him with tons of unprepared random assaults. But fear not, fellow humans; the computer's evil plan can be foiled by a few strategically placed gun turrets. After that it's wave after wave of dead enemy troops as a strike force is built to finish the mission. In short, the AI is less than awe inspiring.

Despite these shortcomings, *Dark Reign* does make several contributions to its genre. There is a nice waypoint feature, which includes the option for looping the waypoints around to create a patrol path. With limited fields of vision being further constricted by different terrain, patrols around one's base can be very useful. Another option is the scout order; simply tell a unit to scout and it will explore the map, avoiding any enemies it encounters. Also, there are two derivatives of the scout command: "harass" and "search and destroy." Harass orders a unit to irritate and generally annoy your opponent by numerous limited attacks while "search and destroy" makes a unit go find an enemy and try to kill it. All of these features are well done, and can be a crucial part of winning a game.

Another neat feature is the ability to assign "exit points" for newly constructed units. For each assembly plant or training facility, the player can select a location to which new units move, saving the player from manually reinforcing the front line.

Also, Freedom Guard players can "pack up" and move certain buildings, which can add a twist to a game. (After seeing this in the manual, you may envision mobs of migrating gun turrets. Alas, the turrets can't be moved, so we'll never hear frenzied cries of "Hey, how did that Neutron Accelerator get inside my base?!!")

If anything can be said about the game, it has a long list of bells and whistles…perhaps even too long. The beauty of some earlier games of this genre is an elegant simplicity combined with layers of strategy to make them addictive. Anyone who's played much multiplayer *Warcraft II* can attest to this. Activision is taking a different approach: the simplicity is being sacrificed for more and more features. Does this approach make a better game? That depends on the usefulness of these features.

Fortunately, the bells and whistles for *Dark Reign* can be quite handy in combat, with very few exceptions. You may not use all the features in every battle, but you will find yourself using most of the features most of the time. A player that doesn't use the scout option will be at a disadvantage to one that does. The bells and whistles in the game are far from a marketing ploy; they effectively make the game a more intense gaming environment.

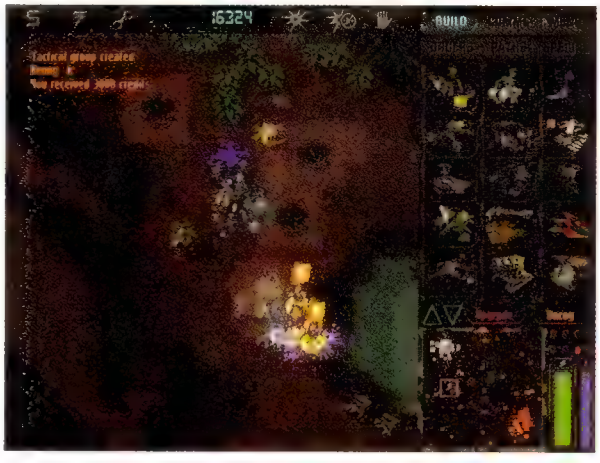
No review is complete without a look at the pieces with which players do battle. *Dark Reign* has much of the standard fare: tanks, infantry, artillery, and gun turrets are all on the menu. But also included are some that help make the game unique. There are scouts that morph into trees (very useful) and the devastating Sky Fortress that destroys tall buildings in a single blast (hard to get, but well worth the wait). What makes *Dark Reign* nice is that almost all of the units are actually useful. Infantry are not squashed by dozens of oncoming tanks. The artillery has such long range that you can actually have it shelling the enemy base from within your own (the limiting factor in many cases is the ability to see the target).

Also, the units behave much smarter than in most games of this genre. (There's nothing quite so frustrating as having a group of flame-throwers fry themselves to death when trying get around a tree.) The attention that wasn't paid to the enemy AI was given to the units' routing routines. If a player selects a group of units at Point A and tells them to go to Point B, they take the best route, finding their way there consistently and reliably. The player finally feels like a commander, not an Orc shepherd.

Another nice aspect is that the Imperium and Freedom Guard have significant differences in their kinds of units. Although the basic forces are roughly equivalent, each side has a few special weapons that the other lacks. Surprisingly, the sides are balanced quite well. There is no clear advantage to playing one side over the other, and the tactics can change significantly by switching.

This brings us to the most brilliant stroke in the game: there is no equivalent of *Red Alert's* tank rush. Gone are the days of building medium tanks as fast as possible; *Dark Reign* forces the player to constantly respond to new situations and scenarios. Even if a mechanical strategy works on one map, it will fail elsewhere. For the thousands of players that have grown frustrated seeing large swarm of tanks mob your base, the solution may have arrived.

Dark Reign has some serious drawbacks, but it also has some great advantages. When considering this game, remember this: it is a multiplayer game. Period. Without an Internet connection, modem, or LAN to play on, there just isn't much to this game. The graphics and concept behind the game are nothing that hasn't been done before. While there is little innovation, there are fixes to many of the complaints people have had about earlier real-time strategy games. *Dark Reign* is an evolutionary step. It is a good game, with an impressive list of features that puts it above many of its competitors. If you're looking for new graphics or a good plot line, it may not be for you. But if you're interests lie in the multiplayer arena, *Dark Reign* is definitely worth a look. *–Ryan Brush*



[top to bottom]

A combination of units is essential to conquer an enemy

Freedom Guard skirmish tanks lay waste to a fallen opponent

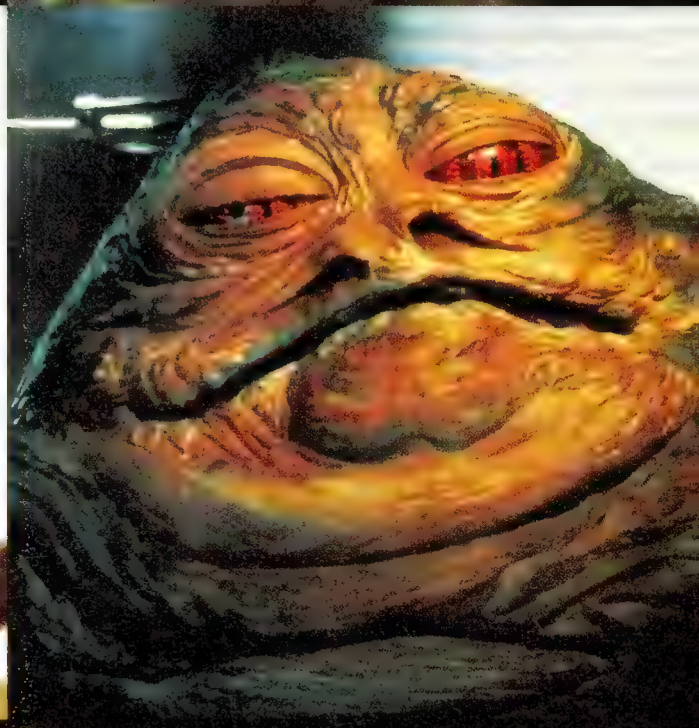
Artillery rains down from afar, destroying the victim's base

Air, ground, and hover units combine for unique battles

★★★½☆

Dark Reign

Activision • www.activision.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16 MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial



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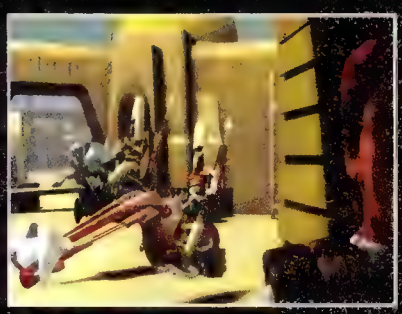

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Total Annihilation

Warcraft all over again... in a good way

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

The units are 3d rendered objects rather than sprites. Good dog!

At a time when nearly every game on the crowded store shelves bears a suspicious resemblance to its neighbor, it will not surprise most gamers to learn that the trend of cloning popular games has done them a great disservice. What might be surprising is the nature of that disservice – the tainting of the reputation of evolutionary game designs. Not everything can be completely new and different, and building on good ideas is sometimes as worthwhile an endeavor as coming up with new ones. Many clones fail to follow through on the "building" part, however, and while emulation and evolution are not really the same thing, the distinction is sometimes lost.

As a game of resource management and tactical combat, *Total Annihilation* is not fundamentally different from anything that has come before, but it is nonetheless an evolutionary leap for the genre of real-time strategy. By building on the strengths of its predecessors in almost every respect while simultaneously addressing their weaknesses, it manages to achieve a distinct character despite its derivative roots.

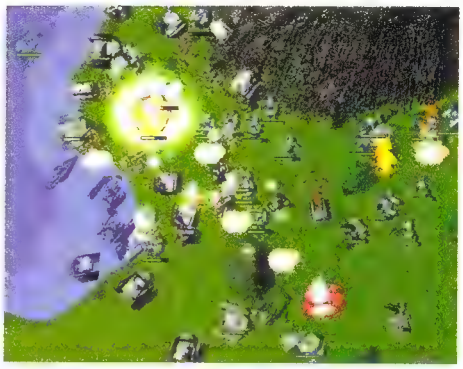
In the far future, the development of a process called "Patterning" allows human consciousness to be transferred into machines and has split humanity into two opposing factions. The Core believes that all humans should undergo this process and take advantage of the virtual immortality that it offers, while the Arm believes that Patterning is an atrocity. Their war has reduced much of the civilized galaxy to ruins. Which faction is right? It doesn't really matter – the story is little more than a backdrop for the game's epic battles. As either the Core or the Arm, the player moves from world to world, seizing tactical objectives and searching for the Galactic Gate which will enable them to carry the war deeper into enemy space and ultimately to the enemy's home world. Both the Arm and the Core boast a single-player campaign of 25 scenarios, most of which are unique in setting and objective. Many players will find over 100 hours of gameplay before even touching the multiplayer mode.

One of the most daunting obstacles the next generation of real-time strategy games face is reconciling the desire for more detailed control with the necessity of having a fast and simple interface. Defying the paradox, *Total Annihilation* does both. The interface is one of the game's greatest strengths, and while the options it provides are simple and intuitive to learn and use, they can be employed in surprisingly complex ways. The player can give any number of multiple commands to units, for instance, simply by holding down the shift key while giving them.

[top to bottom]
The Arm launches a surprise amphibious assault on the Core's rear guard...

...While another Arm force storms a mountain pass...

...Trapped between the mountains and the sea, the Core forces are quickly annihilated



The unit will then carry out the commands in its queue in the order in which they were given. There is no more clicking involved than there would be if the commands were given one at a time, and by giving units a number of tasks to keep them occupied players spend less time baby-sitting and more time planning their strategy. The units can also be given standing orders by toggling their aggressiveness and mobility traits, which control the amount of leeway they have in holding both position and fire. It is a simple set of controls to operate, but the combination of these two factors can make units act in nearly any fashion players might desire.

The structures that produce units can be given multiple commands in the same way that the units themselves can – simply click on whatever units you want a structure build and it will churn them out in the order you entered. You can order the structure to produce units with specific mobility and aggressiveness settings, and you can even tell it where to send them when they emerge. Each feature seems to reduce the micro-management more than increase it – players can have their cake and eat it too.

Best of all, the single-player interface allows players to pause the game. They can survey the battlefield, set standing orders, and even give queued commands while the action is frozen. It is a very simple feature that addresses the biggest complaint strategy gamers have voiced concerning real-time games – the dominance of fast action over carefully planned strategy. In *Total Annihilation* you can have either or both, and the option is very welcome.

Some of the obvious innovations in gameplay are easy to recognize. Both the terrain and the units are rendered in 3D, and while it makes for some stunning visuals, it affects gameplay even more profoundly. Tanks and infantry tilt and roll on inclines, aircraft bank into turns and perform barrel rolls and wingovers. The terrain is a broad canvas of rolling hills and valleys, towering trees and dense foliage, boulders and craters and ruins. Add a detailed system of physics and you have a tactician's dream (or nightmare) come true.

Terrain affects not only line of sight, but

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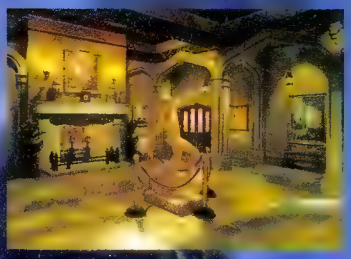

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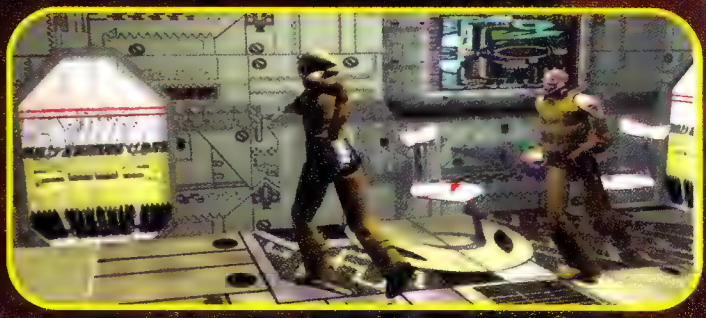
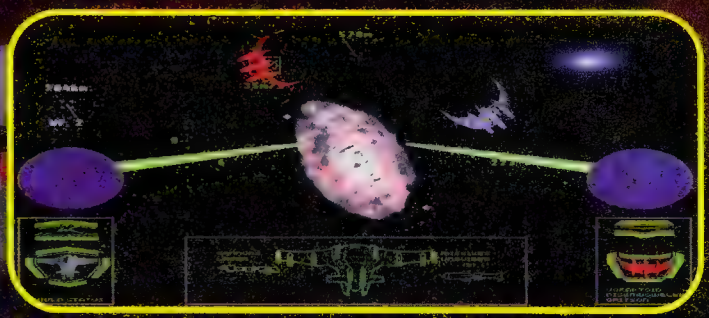
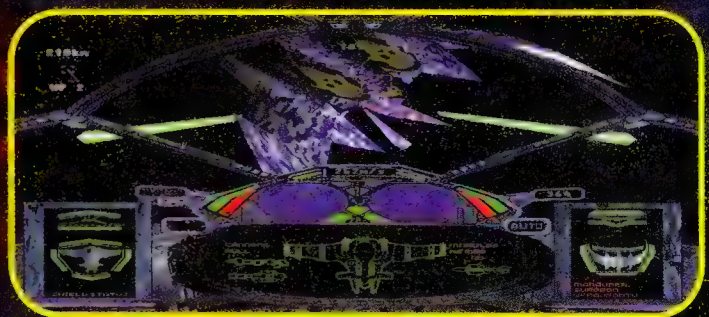


Consequence of Action - It's not just if you win or lose, or even how you play the game. Everything you do determines how the game is even played at all.



Roshambo Combat Strategy - Space combat with a twist. Your ship is a rock. Another is paper. Another is scissors. You can't beat them all & they can't all beat you. Plan your attacks accordingly.



A Thickening Plot - With an unparalleled depth of play, set against out-of-this-world SGI graphics, figure out a constantly changing story as you maneuver & master four fighters, while dealing with three different alien races.

ripcord GAMES

Orbital Studios Inc.

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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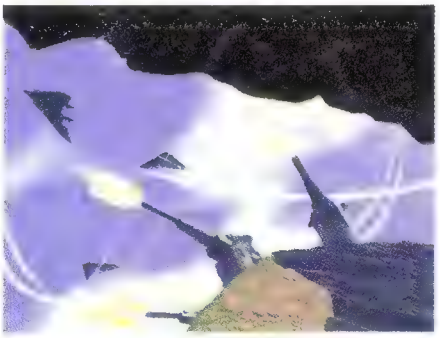
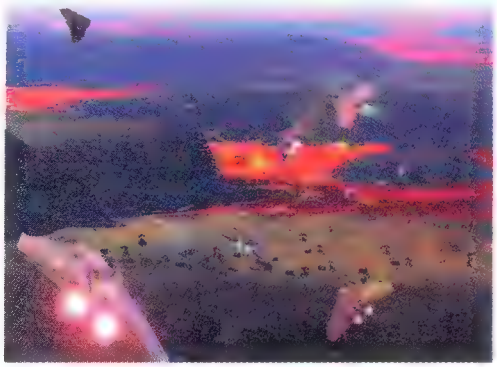
also line of fire. Many units employ flat trajectory weapons that can be blocked by terrain, but a variety of artillery and missile units and emplacements can lob shells over hills or even mountains. Situating artillery units on high ground increases their range, sometimes to the point at which they can fire farther than they can see, making it necessary to employ another unit or radar for spotting purposes. The physics are not limited to artillery trajectories, either. Wind varies in direction and speed in each scenario, and is largely dictated by the conditions of the planet on which the scenario takes place. At first it may seem that this has little impact on the game aside from a few visual effects – wind generators turn to face the wind, and smoke streams from the wrecks of units in the direction the wind is blowing. The atmosphere of visceral realism this places on the battlefield is welcome enough, but watching as forest fires spread in the direction the wind is blowing reveals a system of physical laws which is more complex than is immediately apparent.

The fashion in which these fascinating little details keep surfacing as the game progresses is reminiscent of *Warcraft II*... in a good way. Additionally, while many of the details in *Warcraft II* were decorative (the amusing verbal retorts of your units, for instance), most of the details in *Total Annihilation* affect gameplay in a more direct fashion... as in the case of the wind.

The game places a firm emphasis on a combined-armed force, and to that end it offers a dizzying array of ground, sea, and air units. The Arm and the Core have roughly 75 units each, and while the roles of the units in each faction are largely similar, many units have their own distinct tactical advantages. Several units, such as the Core's mobile radar vehicle or the Arm's "Spider" tank (which possesses the ability to climb sheer walls), are completely unique to a given faction, while other differences are merely cosmetic. One essential unit employed by both factions is the commander, a unit which represents the player on the battlefield. The commander can build basic structures and produces a small amount of the metal and energy resources needed to survive. He has powerful combat abilities as well, but using them is a risky endeavor – if the commander is killed the player loses the scenario (this is an optional feature in multiplayer games and in single-player skirmish mode). Overall the assortment of units provides enough variation between the two opposing forces to keep the game interesting, while still maintaining a balance between their tactical capabilities.





[top to bottom]
Arm aircraft fall before Core anti-air defenses like wheat to a scythe

Dragon's teeth and weapon emplacements block a narrow pass, while artillery and anti-air Kbots stand hold the ridge above

This airbase, situated on a high plateau, is relatively safe from ground attack

The blasted, volcanic landscape of Barathrum is a bit like Los Angeles in the summer

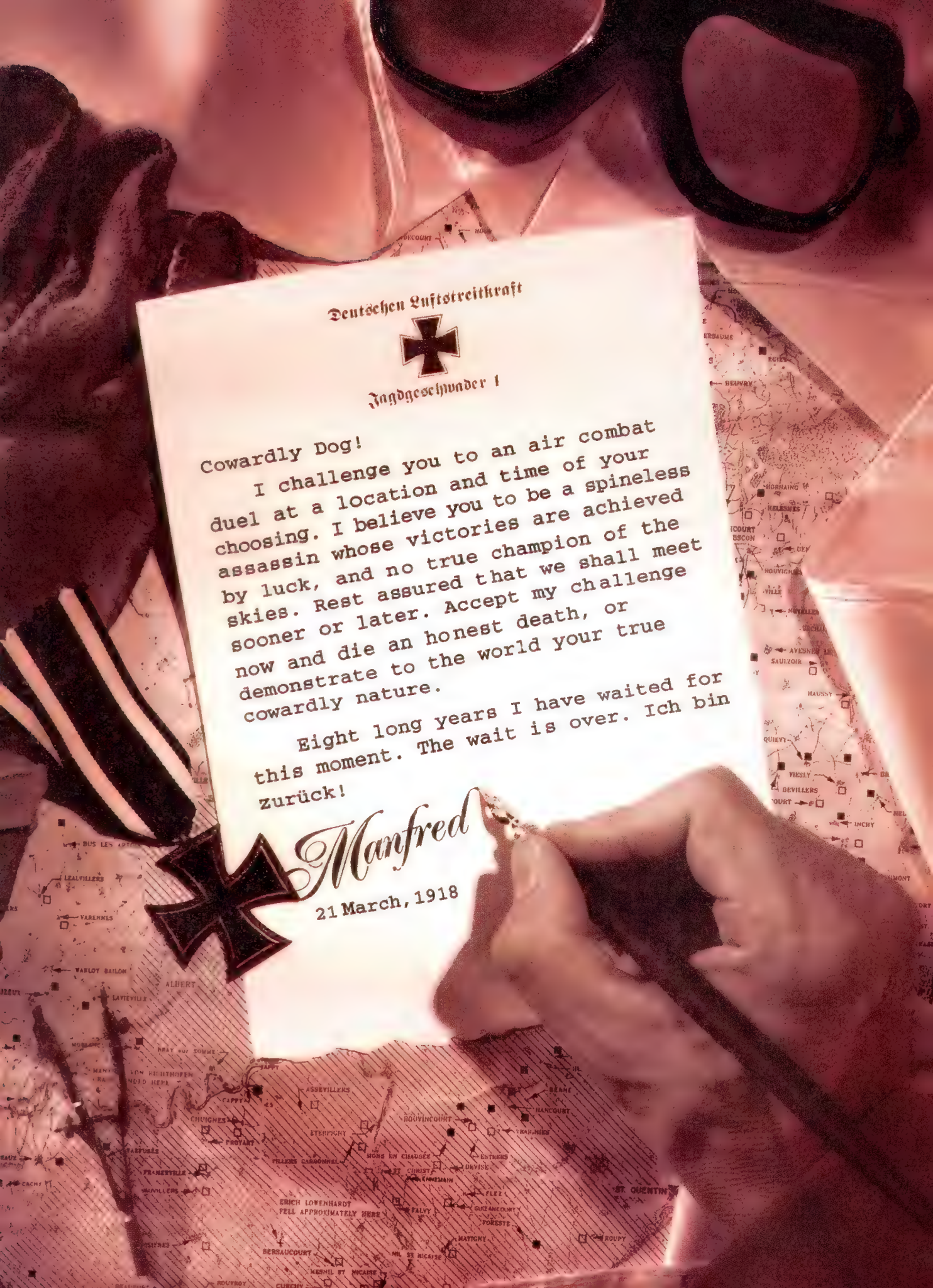
The development of structures needed to build these units is relatively open-ended, providing the player with opportunity to attempt a number of different strategies for building an army. Infantry, armor, aircraft, and naval units each have a separate construction hierarchy, and players can opt to develop these elements in any order. These elements compliment each other on the battlefield, and mutual support roles are as beneficial as one might expect. More so than any other real-time strategy game that has come before, *Total Annihilation* presents the player with a large variety of battlefield tactics that work in a believable and logical fashion.

The scenarios provide ample opportunity to use these tactics. Both the single-player campaigns and the multiplayer maps provide a wide variety of alien worlds to do battle on, and the varying alien vistas are distinct in their visual style and tactical potential. The war rages across forested foothills, blasted volcanic plateaus, windy glaciers, alien seas, and the completely metallic super-city that is the Core home world. The variety of changing battlefields keeps the gameplay fresh throughout the long campaigns.

Are there any flaws in this real-time gem? Unfortunately there are a few. While the AI in the single-player campaign mode is quite challenging, it performs less impressively in single-player skirmish mode. The manual is horribly vague and uninformative, and while it explains what each of the interface controls is for, it fails to adequately explain how to use them. Only the intuitive nature of the interface keeps this from being less damaging. None of this significantly mars the fun or the excellent tactical gameplay, however, and *Total Annihilation* greatly surpasses its predecessors in both areas. Here is to the evolution of the genre. *–Benjamin E. Sones*

★★★★½

Total Annihilation
Cavedog Entertainment • www.totalannihilation.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 133MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players (with increasing hardware requirements per player), Internet, LAN, modem, serial


Deutschen Luftstreitkraft
Jagdgeschwader 1
Cowardly Dog!
I challenge you to an air combat duel at a location and time of your choosing. I believe you to be a spineless assassin whose victories are achieved by luck, and no true champion of the skies. Rest assured that we shall meet sooner or later. Accept my challenge now and die an honest death, or demonstrate to the world your true cowardly nature.
Eight long years I have waited for this moment. The wait is over. Ich bin zurück!
Manfred
21 March, 1918
ERICH LOWENHARDT
FELL APPROXIMATELY HERE

The Baron is B

It's a Dynamix® first–Sopwith Camels in cyberspace. Multiplayer dogfighting action featuring internet and LAN support with up to eight players and two player head-to-head modem play.

Fly over a dozen types of single missions for quick action or select Campaign play to experience the full historical impact of Red Baron® II. Fly for Britain, France, the U.S. or Germany. Progress from a lowly wingman to squadron commander, earning rank, prestige and better aircraft on the way.

Dynamix's revolutionary new 3Space™2.0 engine leaps ahead of the competition with unmatched realism in terrain modelling, stunning graphics and the most advanced flight models ever brought to the home computer.

He's cunning, deadly, egotistical and totally ruthless–the most famous, and feared, fighter pilot that ever lived. Now he's your ultimate opponent.
The Baron is back!

An epic achievement over three years in the making, Red Baron® II is the most richly detailed, all-encompassing flight sim ever to explode on the screen–and a true sequel to the legendary Red Baron®. From a multitude of gamer-directed features to stunning visual, audio and tactile effects driven by state-of-the-art technology, Red Baron® II will place you squarely in the flak-filled skies of World War I at the birth of aerial combat. It's in your face dogfighting and strategy at its best, a game so complete that it has no challenger... except you.

KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
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ESRB

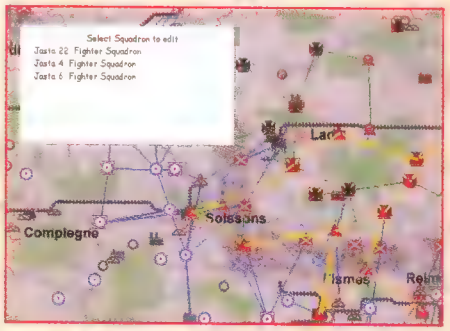
ack!

"...yet another classic."

The skills, tactics and personalities of historical and non-historical pilots are recreated with unbelievable realism by Dynamix's new ACE AI™ system. As you attempt to take out a computer-driven opponent, your only complaint may be that the AI is too good!

"Red Baron® II will make thousands of Aces happy this winter." — Hardcore Gamer

Edit existing missions or customize one of your own with the Dynamix Mission Builder™. From within historical settings, you control everything from objectives and flight plans to plane types and pilots, assuring a nearly limitless variety of missions.



"Open cockpit, pre-radar, crash-n-burn dogfighting at it's best - a simulation well worth the prolonged wait..." — Game Briefs

Customize the look, colors and insignias of your planes in the Plane Paintshop. Use provided patterns and palettes or import your own custom artwork from any standard paint program.

Red Baron® II

You're History!

"When I took a hit from ground fire my view got increasingly red and the groans and labored breathing of my virtual pilot increased until I was ready to call my wife at work and ask her advice (she's an RN)."
–Hardcore Gamer

"... Red Baron II is one of the most impressive simulations ever created."
-PCME

Featuring

Red Baron® II is much more than a combat flight sim. It's a virtual war in a box, where every character, vehicle and event is controlled by its own AI system, and all operate within meticulously researched historical settings. The entire world is alive at all times, ground activity is intense, historical battles rage whether you are there to see them or not and no two missions are ever alike.

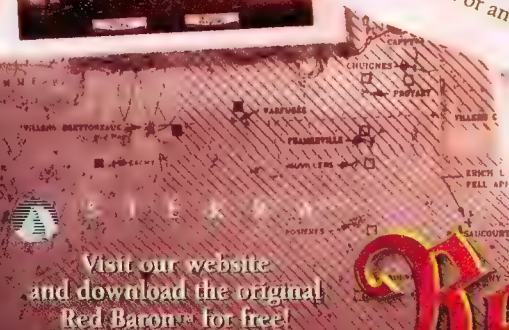
Encounter 40 unique aircraft with 22 flyable planes from the early fighters such as the Morane bullet and Fokker Eindecker to the improved Pfalz DXII and Sopwith Snipes. Dynamix's force-based, real world physics flight model faithfully simulates the performance envelopes of the actual historical planes.

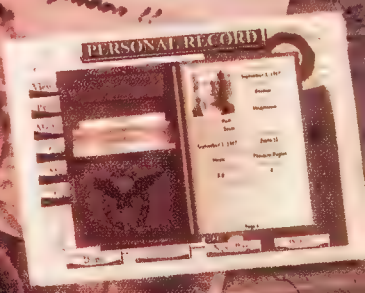
User definable difficulty levels allow players of all abilities to take to the skies in a challenge uniquely customized to their own skills and tastes.

40,000 square miles of accurately mapped terrain put you in the real topography of the Western Front circa 1916, complete with accurately placed cities, villages, aerodromes, bridges, trenches and battle zones. Targets you'll recognize from the aerial recon photos in your briefings.

Total immersion is the name of the game. Force Feedback rocks you with turbulence from nearby explosions and direct hits, while authentic 3D sounds abound.

Bullets riddle your plane, shattering wood and shredding canvas. The sky screams with red tracers, smoke and explosions. And as the Red Baron himself blasts out of the sun's glare... as you hear the ominous start to sweat and your pulse races... as you hear the ominous groans of stressed wings the instant before they shatter... you realize that this is much more than just a game. This is a taste of history. And your next move will determine whether you become a legend... or another kill in the Baron's book.





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Red Baron II

Dynamix

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You've been warned.

Outpost 2: Divided Destiny

If at first you don't succeed, try a sequel

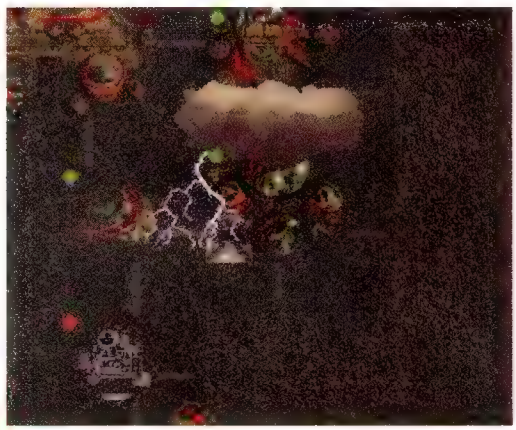
The original *Outpost* is symbolic of games released before they're complete. It has come to represent the bitter disappointment we feel when a company cuts corners and falls woefully short of what was expected. So the big question surrounding this sequel to Sierra's disastrous release is whether they've redeemed themselves. But of course they're well aware of the scrutiny this game will receive, the inevitable comparisons, the old wounds poised for re-opening, the indignant masses ready to cry out injustice all over again. So it should come as no surprise to discover that *Outpost* 2 is better than the original. There are no promised features missing. It is solid, stable, complete, polished, and player-friendly. In fact, two-thirds of the manual is a slow and methodical step-by-step walk-through of the game's features and how to work them. It's as if Sierra is saying, "Just to make sure there are no misunderstandings, here's exactly what the game does and here's exactly how you do it."

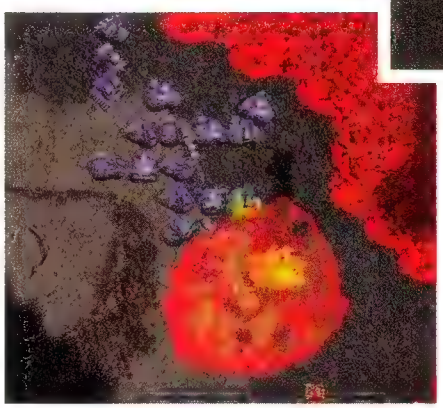
But the cardinal sin in game design, perhaps even more heinous than making an incomplete or buggy or confusing game, is making a dull game. Like decaffeinated coffee or alcohol-free beer, *Outpost 2* feels like the real thing, but without the kick you'd expect. It straddles a few genres without the essential ingredients that make each one successful: it is *SimCity* without the charm, *Warcraft* without the personality, *Command & Conquer* without the detailed action, and Master of Orion without the epic sprawl.

Outpost 2 most closely resembles *SimCity* in terms of gameplay. The player's primary task is colony management, balancing the needs of the colonists with the available resources; in effect, using power, ore, research, and labor in the combination that most efficiently boosts morale and causes baby colonists to happen (it's safe to say the point of this game is to encourage your colonists to have sex). Progress is tracked through various reports detailing power usage, morale, and population distribution. *SimCity*-esque disasters will occasionally hinder your efforts, particularly on the higher difficulty levels. You'll have to research technological advances and fight the occasional battle, but building the structures to protect and house happy families is the key to everything. Many of the scenarios are like puzzles in which you have to cobble together a functional colony before a certain time limit runs out. In some of the scenarios, there is only one successful route to victory, so you'll have to replay it several times before you succeed. For many players, this will mean frustrating brick walls as early as the third mission. Luckily, there are more open-ended scenarios available and a great variety of maps available for multiplayer games.

But what makes *SimCity* entertaining is missing from *Outpost 2*. Whereas the bare terrain in *SimCity* grows into a colorful and lively urban sprawl, *Outpost 2*'s barren landscapes sprout a few generic-looking buildings haphazardly organized. Recreation facilities look like ore smelters which look like vehicle factories which look like nurseries. Some buildings boast a few lackluster animations: a moving panel here or a sparking cable there, perhaps a puff of steam or a sliding door. People tubes must connect each structure, but the graphics leave conspicuous gaps between the end of a tube and the building itself. It's not difficult to connect structures once you get used to this, but it's just another visual shortcoming. The biggest problem is that nothing looks alive. You wouldn't know anyone lived here except for a single monochrome report detailing how many children, workers, and scientists you have. All the people are shut indoors never to show their faces. It's *SimCity* without the charming bustle, set in a dreary colony limited to a couple hundred unseen folks.

Partly compensating for this lifelessness, the scenarios in *Outpost 2* tell a passable story of two competing philosophies on a barren planet. The colonists of Plymouth want to adapt to the harsh environment, while those of Eden hope to terraform the planet into a second Earth. It's not as dramatic as hordes of orcs or the legions of Nod, but it's fleshed out nicely in two parallel campaigns. The backstory emerges through what might be called text-based cutscenes: each scenario is introduced with a chapter from a novella. It's a well written, character-driven story, but it slices up into a poor substitute for gamers accustomed to dazzling animated sequences. And apparently Sierra didn't think they could get away without





[clockwise from the top of page]

Say "hello" to your colonists; this is as close as you'll get to them

In the proud tradition of Pompeii, Mt. Pinatubo, and Montserrat, there's nothing like an advancing pool of lava to level a few buildings

For so small a cloud, this storm's lightning packs quite a wallop

Tank rush, anybody?

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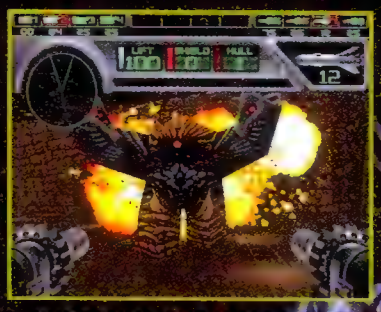
"...real gameplay."
"... sharp 3D engine that looks like it could stand toe to toe with Quake™ ..."
PC Gamer



SUDDENLY, THE WALLS CAME CRASHING DOWN AND ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE

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cutscenes, since they did include a few perfunctory repeating sequences.

Since it's real-time, *Outpost 2* will be lumped in with the holiday glut of *Command & Conquer* clones. But as a combat game, it comes up short since the emphasis is on colony micromanagement. Direct player input is required for building structures, bulldozing roads, repairing damaged or deteriorated buildings, controlling vehicles, surveying mining sites, and assigning colonists. On the whole, *Outpost 2*'s fluid interface makes this as painless as can be, but there are a few annoying hitches. For example, whenever you want to load a truck, something you do constantly as you build new structure, you have to endure the niggling annoyance of a four second animation. A smoothly-run colony requires the careful use of workers and scientists, but you have to manually juggle them to maintain peak efficiency. Scientists will have to be taken away from research projects when new buildings go up and workers have to be shuffled to keep vital buildings online and unnecessary ones idled until they're needed. All this wouldn't be so bad if it were the game's exclusive focus. But in combat situations, *Outpost 2* is not like it's real-time cousins, where you can leave your buildings to their own devices while you manage an assault.

There are a limited number of fighting units, created by mounting one of a half dozen available weapons on a guard tower or chassis. Unlike *Warcraft*, there is no maintenance limit on the number of units that can be built, so tank rushes will tend to decide battles rather than clever tactical combos. To be fair, the weapons are nicely varied: there are area effect, freeze, disabling, and long range attacks. But the unit management doesn't lend itself well to taking advantage of different weapons' capabilities, an almost impossible task if you're also trying to keep your colony running. On the lower difficulty levels, combat is almost an afterthought, even in the later scenarios. But in multiplayer games, or games on harder difficulty levels, you can't spend the necessary time with combat if you want efficient growth and balanced development. Many of the scenarios take this into account with an either/or approach: they are either structure-based missions or vehicle-based missions. The difficulty in balancing these two aspects of *Outpost 2* is the most conspicuous symptom of its genre schizophrenia.

Outpost 2's strongest feature is its tech tree, an extensive branching structure of advances your colony can research. These advances develop your buildings and vehicles nicely, as well as opening various options for power, mining, and disaster safeguards; as with *Master of Orion* or *Civilization*, each new advance alters the game slightly. But given their enigmatic names (Hot-Cracking Column Efficiency? Large Scale Optical Resonators? Cybernetic Teleoperation?), they're hard to follow and don't make sense until you've played several times. Whereas the first *Outpost* was daunting partly because of its adherence to hard science, *Outpost 2* intimidates by using big words to describe simple concepts. For instance, to build meteor defenses, you have to research a High Energy Ray Composite Projector. Huh? It doesn't help that the manual's coverage of vehicles and structures includes no information about these technologies. Rather, the details are tucked away in a hard-to-find text file that installs onto your hard drive. This file explains everything thoroughly and it prints out into an attractive supplement. But if Sierra wasn't going to include this information in the printed manual, they should have at least made it more prominent; it's not even mentioned in the README.TXT file.

[from left to right]

Can you tell the research labs from the ore smelters? The structure graphics aren't much help

Don't mind the gaps; despite appearances, the people tubes are actually connected to this structure

The biggest problem with *Outpost 2* is the aforementioned lack of kick. It's just not very thrilling. Yes, it's solid. Yes, it's complete. Yes, it works as advertised. But it doesn't draw you in with the allure of doing better next time, or the mystery of seeing what challenges lie ahead. There's no sense of discovery. There's very little sense of accomplishment. Combat isn't very well integrated (almost any damage to your colony will cripple you and throw you hopelessly off kilter). Disasters may as well be random damage applied to your buildings (storms and meteors) or sudden swaths of terrain made impassable (lava). Building structures and shuffling colonists gets tedious after a few games. The time limits may lead to a bit of tension as you fight to meet your goals before lava or blight overruns your colony, but this is a contrived thrill that comes with finding the scenario's correct solution. By far the most exciting thing during the delicate early stages of a scenario is the quiet little tone that announces the birth of a new child, the death of a scientist, or the training of a worker. It says a lot about a game when these mundane events are more significant than earthquakes, volcanoes, or rampaging tanks. *–Tom Chick*

Outpost 2's predictions about the future

- Scientist will become a bunch of lazy whiney babies (morale drops if they're assigned to regular work)
- The Teamsters won't be around any more (there are no drivers in vehicles)
- The unemployed won't have sex (birthrates drop if your workers aren't kept busy)
- If you don't tell people about health care, they won't need it (there's no morale loss from a lack of hospitals until you research Health Maintenance)
- Ping Pong will become the favorite pastime (click on a Recreation Facility and listen to what they're doing)
- Adult supervision for daycare will be a cake walk (it only takes one worker to staff a nursery crammed with 50 babies)
- The eyeball will become the sensor of choice (vehicles with their lights off can sneak up undetected on their opponent)
- Paint will become passé (all Plymouth buildings are brown; all Eden buildings are gray)

★★☆☆☆

Outpost 2: Divided Destiny

Sierra • www. sierra com

Requirements:Windows 95, 60MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-6 players, Internet (via SIGS), LAN, modem

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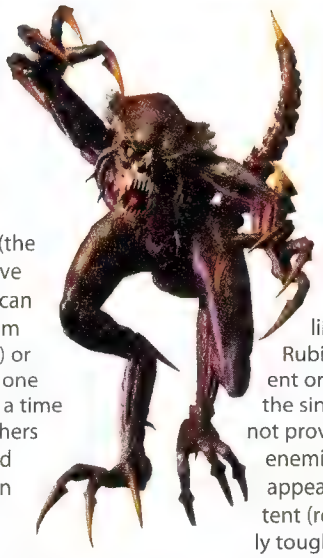
Single-player puzzle, multiplayer delight



Incubation is Blue Byte's latest foray into their *Battle Isle* series of sci-fi strategy games. Instead of a top-down, futuristic "wargame" of the earlier titles, it purports to place gamers into tactical combat situations à la *X-COM* or *Jagged Alliance*. The game's story, however, has little tie-in with the series, and is self-contained: after accidental exposure to a human virus (Herpes Simplex…wonder how they got it?), the peaceful inhabitants of the planet Scayra have begun to mutate into violent, deadly (and pretty dumb) creature who are now attacking the human colony on their planet. You command a squad of Marines who are charged with dealing with the incursion in a game that – knowingly or not – recreates the feel of the movie *Aliens*.

The game starts off with a tremendous visual bang. Blue Byte used the 3D graphics engine from their *Extreme Assault* game to create what has to be the most impressive visuals on any strategy game yet released… and that's before you run it on a 3Dfx-equipped machine. On a 133MHz Pentium without a 3D card the game ran noticeably slower than on the same machine with one. Of course, as this is a turn-based game, speed isn't critical, so the occasionally slow animation of characters shouldn't interfere with enjoyment (much). Sound is also a treat; from the moody music to the weapons and alien effects it's excellent, and helps to give you an "I am Ripley" feeling.

Many of Blue Byte's games have had interfaces best described as obtuse, but it appears they've learned their lesson; *Incubation*'s interface is well laid out and easy to pick up. Click on a unit, choose a target, and fire; or, select a movement point and direction to face once reached, and off the character goes. Characters can be set in defensive mode, and react appropriately during the enemy turn. During combat, there are no separate inventory screens; the few items you can work with all appear on a character bar.

The game is best in its multiplayer modes. Sending a squad up against a human-controlled squad is extremely enjoyable. The tension level can grow quite high, largely because the turns are relatively short. The variety of modes is impressive as well; aside from the usual LAN and Internet, you can play-by-e-mail and even hot-seat (the latter are almost chess-like, as you move one character per side at a time). You can either choose to build your squads from pre-set characters ("mercenary mode") or design them from the ground up (the one flaw of multiplayer: only one player at a time can design and deploy their squad; others must wait). Choose one of the included maps, set conditions, and off you go; in this mode *Incubation* really feels like a tactical-level strategy game.

Then there's the single-player campaign, where, unfortunately, gamers will probably spend most of their time. Why unfortunately? Because it's here that the designers turn the excellent tactical squad-level multiplayer game into what is, at many times, a fancy puzzle game. Many missions – especially those with turn limits – require you to throw out the idea of tactics to move through the mission in a very particular manner. While the weapons mix you choose for your squad may let you take a different approach at times, you still feel like you're turning the Rubic's cube in a different order. The challenge in the single player games is not provided by the Scay'ger enemies – the AI in them appears almost non-existent (restarting a particularly tough puzzle mission for the *n*th time seems to show the same AI movement pattern repeated again and again) – but instead by the mission's design. Sometimes success in a mission comes down to tiny little details, and you have to redo a mission (for hours?) until you hit on the right combination. The frustration in facing these kinds of adventure-like puzzles is somewhat offset by the missions with reduced puzzle aspects, but these are *too* easy due to the lack of a real AI, resulting in a campaign that you alternately breeze through or beat your head against.

Incubation is rather like that dear friend who has one single personality trait that drives you absolutely crazy; it does *almost* everything very well, even brilliantly, but one aspect of gameplay – namely, the reliance on puzzle-missions over real strategy settings in single player mode – will be loathed by some. On the other hand, if you don't mind puzzles in your strategy games, or if you'll be primarily playing multiplayer, the game can't be recommended highly enough – your estimation will hinge on the kind of

[top to bottom]

Not a happy sight for our intrepid trooper (first person is one of the game's several view modes)

The jetpack is extremely useful and a nasty surprise to the unsuspecting in multiplayer

Hmm… looks like someone found the present left for them

★★★½☆

Incubation

Blue Byte Software • www.bluebyte.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90 MHz Pentium, 16 MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-4 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial, PBEM, hot-seat

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Conquest Earth

The search for intelligent life continues...

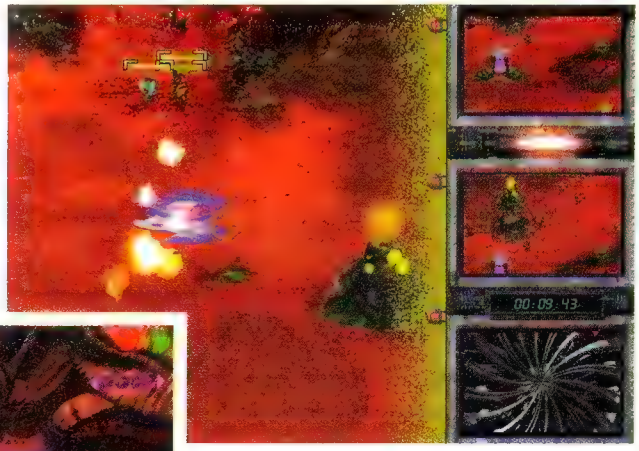
Given that it's the season of the real-time strategy game, a new one needs to do everything right to compete. It needs to have all the right elements to stand above the rest and be more than the sum of its little moving parts. Eidos' foray into the real-time battle, *Conquest Earth*, has a lot in the way of little moving parts, but is something of a mess when viewed as a whole. This time around, it's aliens from Jupiter against the Earth in battles over sixteen types of terrain, complete with fantastic looking, detailed graphics. The look of the aliens pays homage to the War of Worlds, while the humans look like they were borrowed from *Command & Conquer*.

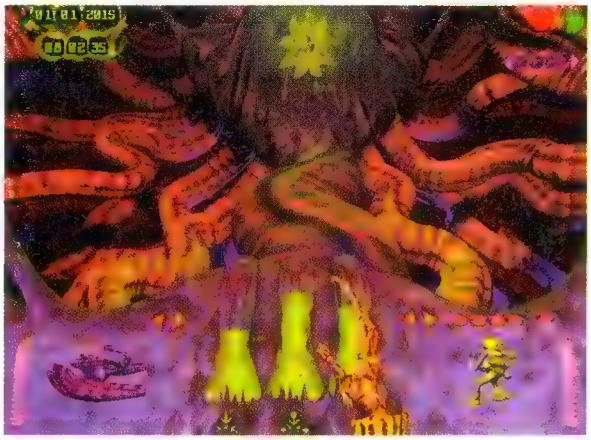
[top to bottom]

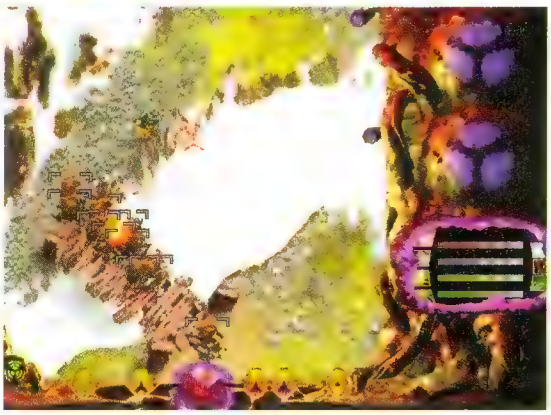
The up close and personal view, as human troops take down a Jovian tank

Campaign mode gives you full control over unit research

Alien troops aren't as diverse as the humans', but their lasers are fast and deadly







Take either side in the battle for Earth in two game modes: missions, which progress through 30 predefined levels of increasing difficulty, and Campaign mode, a much more in-depth game allowing the player control over where they battle on the globe, what they research and where they construct bases. The mission mode is more simplistic than the typical *C&C* clone, as it's mainly centered around building enough troops with the given resources to destroy the enemy's power generator. Building is not nearly as accentuated as in most games of this sort, and there's virtually no unit research tree to worry about. The Campaign mode, which puts everything in the player's hands, is covered woefully in the poorly laid out manual and can be incredibly unforgiving as the enemy seems to already be up to speed from the start. Even the mission mode can be extremely difficult, though this is due in some part to the many idiosyncrasies in the game's AI.

By now, questionable unit intelligence in real-time games has become something of a regrettable given, but when one sees one's own troops blowing up their own buildings instead of the enemy, there's something very wrong going on. At times, troops just about trip over each other and move in pathetic little circles trying to figure out a way around each other when directed to move, though a waypoint command helps for lengthier troop movement. And when attacking, more often than not they simply don't fire fast or early enough to prevent themselves from being slaughtered; usually the player must directly control their squad's fire spread when in a large battle. When "hunting," the troops do—thankfully—take some initiative and use some sense. Another big problem is that *Conquest Earth*'s interface is incredibly unintuitive, especially the inexplicably laid-out alien interface (which even uses something of an alien language). Once learned, however, it at least becomes manageable.

Conquest Earth lacks a mini-map feature as well, instead using a satellite (that, when launched, allows you to zoom in and out of the battleground) and communications devices that allows you to have two mini-windows monitoring units on the map. There is no traditional fog of war either; instead the two sides have what are essentially "fog generators" that pump out toxic smog that obscure parts of the map—an interesting element. You can also take direct, arcade-like control over a single unit, though the use of this is questionable at best. Aerial units require fuel and if they go dry, they'll crash right where they are, even if over friendly troops; if the landing pad is occupied, the craft in flight will still try to land, destroying both craft. Also, the satellite attack, which comes once every 24 hours, forces you to relinquish all troop control to take over the satellite aiming even if you are in the midst of a battle.

Still, in spite of that (or possibly because of it), the game has interesting strategies to employ in battle, and the battles themselves are where the real strength and fun of *Conquest Earth* lie. The hands-on almost arcade-like control can be a lot of fast-paced fun and the general detail of the graphics make blowing up the enemy an arrestingly engaging experience. Although the sound effects are well done, the techno soundtrack is repetitive and uses the actual battle sound effects in the songs, which was not a good idea.

Conquest Earth isn't close to being a great game, but it is a different sort of real time strategy game with some in-depth facets and fun in it if you have the patience and time to uncover them. The AI problems and clunky interface come to forefront though, and despite being fun and exciting at times, bring the game down severely (especially when compared to its massive competition on the store shelves). *–Jason D'Aprile*

★★½☆☆

Conquest Earth

Eidos Interactive • Requirements: DOS, Windows 95, 100MHz Pentium, 16 MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet (via Mplayer), LAN, serial

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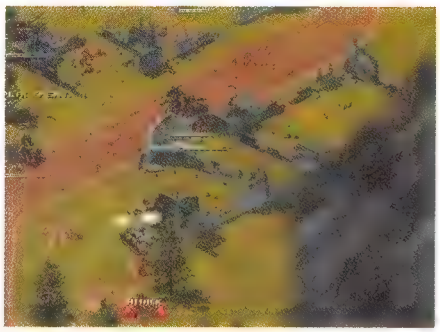
anyone alive.

RETURN FIRE II

7th Legion

Fast paced real-time strategy with a hint of Magic

[clockwise from the top of page]
A God Hammer battle card taking care of armored units
Building units in a 7th Legion base
Fire fights in a bombed out city



Take an average real-time strategy game, throw in some gory cut-scenes, good unit graphics and a touch of *Magic: The Gathering* and you have *7th Legion*. Unfortunately, though several unique features do make it different, problems in the game play keep it from challenging for the real-time strategy crown.

In the future The Chosen, a group of Earth's societal elite that left the planet because of overcrowding, have decided to return to their native home. The remnants of society have banded together into seven legions and must face The Chosen who wish to reclaim their planet. The player takes control of either side in this *Command & Conquer*-style game, constructing units and sending them off to battle. Missions vary greatly from straight on battles to infiltration of enemy bases, and range from very easy to rather difficult with no player adjustable difficulty settings. Two campaigns (one for each side) make up the majority of game play and various multiplayer maps are included as well; no mission editor, however, means these can grow old fast.

Units consist of troops, tanks and Assault Chassis (which look very similar to Mechs from the Battletech® universe) while combat takes place over snow, desert, sparse forest, and crumbling cities. Battles are action-oriented affairs and large groups of troops can be accumulated quickly in certain missions. Unit and building graphics are crisp and clean and contain some neat features like smoke wafting over damaged building as they are pounded by enemy fire. Explosions and weapon effects are also well done, though the corresponding sound effects are on the weak side. Special power-ups appear throughout the game, giving beneficial effects like restoring damage or cloaking your units in a stealth mode.

One of the more unusual features of the games is a set of 52 different "battle cards" which are randomly dealt to the players during the game. They range from devastating attacks like Immolation (which literally toasts an opponent's troops) to Life Syphon (which sucks hits points out of enemies and transfers them to your units). Though appearing out of place in this style of game, they do add some great random events; when placed properly can turn the tide of a battle. Dropping a Chaos card on a large group of units makes for devilish entertainment as they start attacking each other. One particularly nasty card, Summon Apparition, will create an army of spectral Assault Chassis to attack and confuse your enemies.

Unfortunately there are numerous small problems with the game and the sum of these detracts greatly from overall enjoyment. First and foremost is the control of units, which is quirky at best. Selecting a group of units by "boxing" them in the standard gaming fashion often takes several tries. Units take very strange paths to their destination, often splitting up and taking different approaches (no ability to set waypoints really hurts this game). Command of large groups of units can turn into a nightmare as individual units will often drop off the group and not participate with their partners. Sending a large group to attack a well-defended base and finding one third of group has been left behind will not make your day.

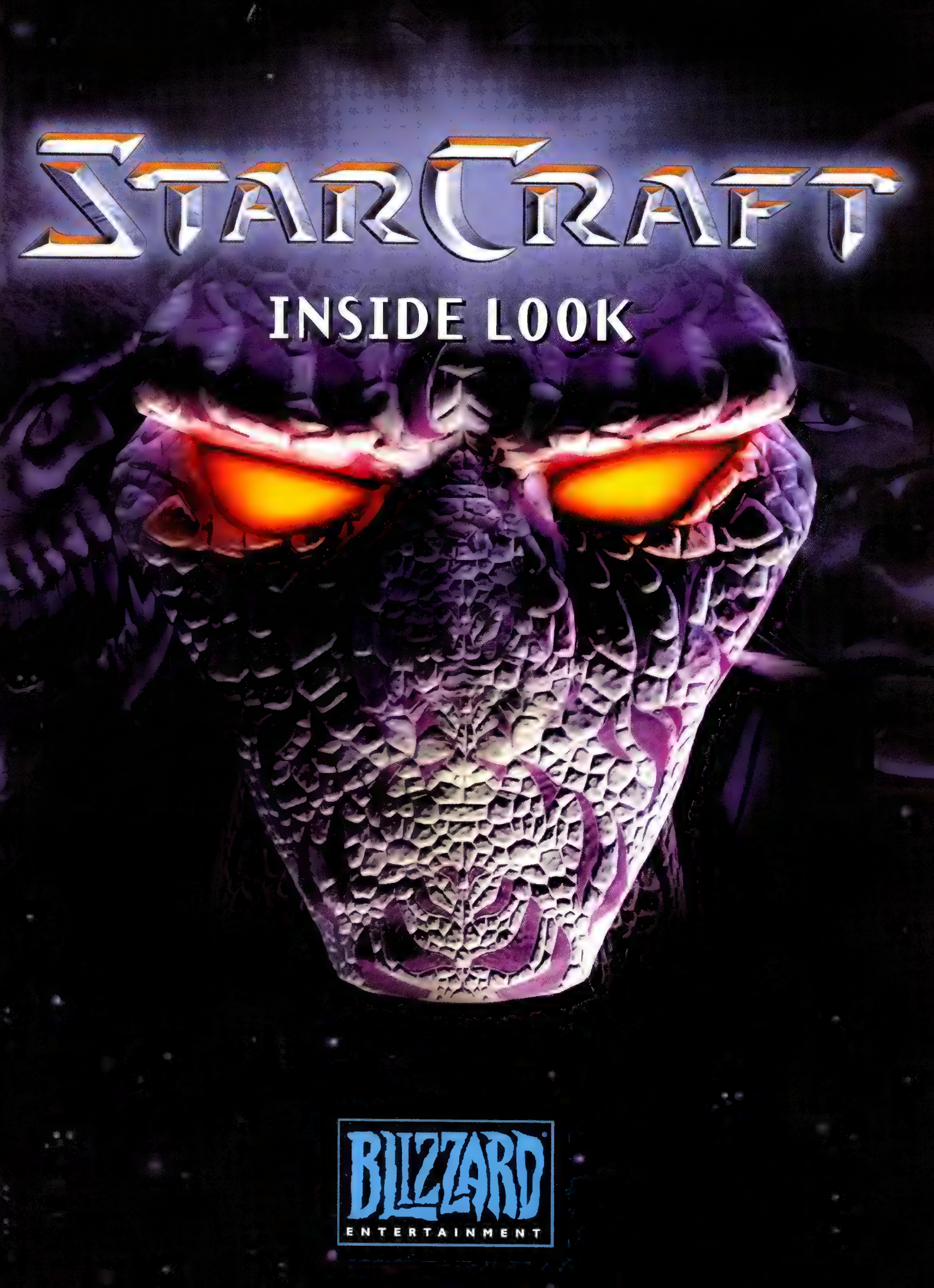
Another disappointing feature is the lack of any real resource management. Money, the one true resource, is granted at regular intervals and also rewarded by defeating units and completing sub-missions. Power is also a "resource" but seldom comes into play unless your power stations are destroyed. The wide variety of missions does help but these missions often turn into long, drawn-out "build and attack" scenarios. A rudimentary technology tree lets you gradually increase the power of weapons and armor but in some roving missions this feature is not used.

Multiplayer is a plus, however, and can be very addicting with various multiplayer maps set up for normal deathmatch-style combat or Capture the Flag. The addition of the battle cards can make for very interesting game play against real opponents who (one hopes) will play more efficiently than the computer AI in single player mode. If you like a real-time strategy game with very little resource management and constant battles then *7th Legion* could be your cup of tea; if, however, you are looking for a well-rounded, strategic game consider checking elsewhere. *–Jim Pedicord*

★★½☆☆

7th Legion

MicroProse • www.microprose.com
Requirements: Windows 95, 100 MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-6 players, Internet, LAN, modem


StarCraft
INSIDE LOOK
BLIZZARD
ENTERTAINMENT

StarCraft

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF REAL-TIME STRATEGY

When *WarCraft: Orcs & Humans* released in 1994, nobody had heard of Blizzard Entertainment, and little attention had been paid to a new category of games dubbed "real-time strategy." But when *WarCraft II* and *Command & Conquer* hit the scene and began captivating gamers by the millions, real-time strategy became an overnight success. In a move to stay in front of the dozens of RTS clones coming this holiday season, Blizzard has spent two years quietly preparing what it hopes will define the next generation in real-time strategy gaming—*StarCraft*.

In *StarCraft*, three species head on a collision course in a struggle for galactic domination. Faced with the grim possibility of mass destruction, the Terrans, Protoss and Zerg will stop at nothing to ensure the survival of their species.

Throughout the game's 30 missions, the conflict rages across barren wastelands, fragmented orbital space platforms, dense jungles and the interior of enemy space stations. Each battle brings new challenges, as players must employ different strategies in order to escape extinction.

Committed to offering gamers more than just an RTS clone, Blizzard's development team is introducing an impressive lineup of new features. The game will be loaded with an enhanced artificial intelligence, a fully functional campaign editor, real-time light sourcing and translucency effects, neutral characters and free online gaming, just to name a few.

In this exclusive *StarCraft* preview, Blizzard offers. an inside look at the game's new species, units, missions, graphics and more. ■

INSIDE LOOK: STARCRAFT INNOVATIONS

Those who thought *StarCraft* might just be "Orcs in space" are in for a pleasant surprise. Determined to push the boundaries of real-time strategy, Blizzard designers set out to make *StarCraft* as big a step forward from *War*Craft II as *War*Craft II was over the original. With a host of new competitors jumping into the RTS genre, Blizzard stepped back and considered what improvements they wanted most as gamers.

Three Unique Species

The biggest fundamental change the team envisioned was the introduction of three inherently different species. Instead of creating sides that mirror each other, the goal was to develop distinct races with unique histories, motives, technologies, weaponry and strategies.

Said Allen Adham, president of Blizzard Entertainment, "In the *WarCraft* series, we approached units similar to chess pieces, meaning that for every human unit, there was an equivalent for the Orcs. In *StarCraft*, every species is radically different. To succeed, players will have to alter their style of play depending on not only which race they are commanding, but also which race they are battling. No one winning strategy will apply from race to race."

The result is three opposing forces intertwined in an epic struggle for galactic domination. The scavenging Terrans survive by pillaging resources and technologies from distant worlds. The Protoss, an ancient psychic race, rely on powerful energy pylons to keep them in constant contact with their homeworld, Auir. And, the Zerg, a deadly swarm of ravenous biological predators, morph into genetically mutated creatures and cause havoc on the galactic rim. As the races collide in three separate

campaigns, players experience the game from each side's perspective.

Three Theatres of Battle

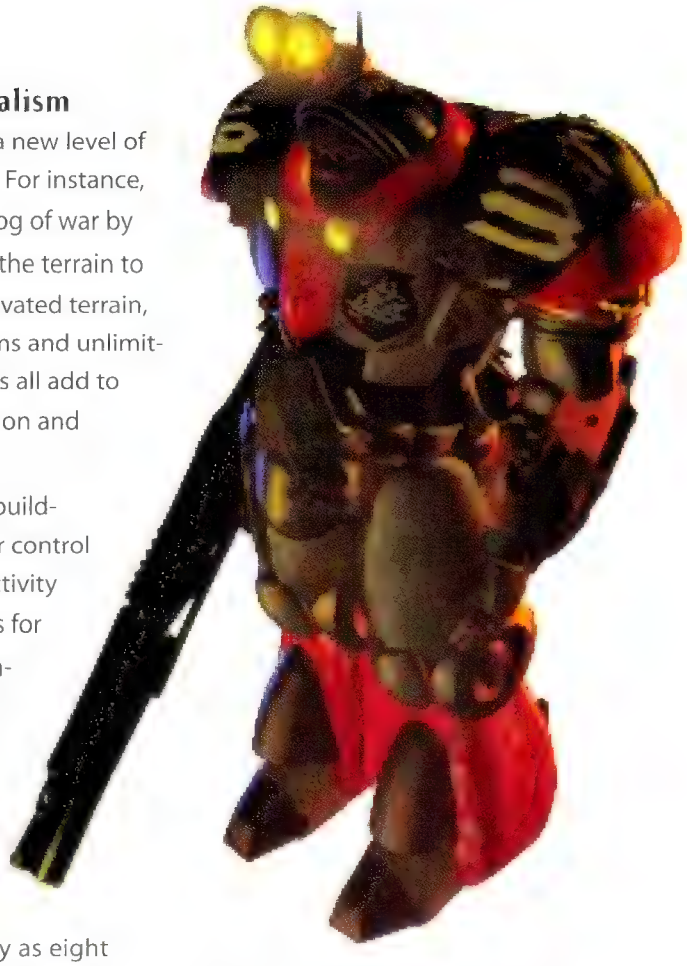
Whether deployed on a diplomatic escort assignment or a full assault, seek-and-destroy mission, the 30 missions in *StarCraft* vary as much as the species. Throughout the game, players will encounter a variety of scenarios with ship-to-ship combat over abandoned space platforms or ground skirmishes on planetary surfaces. Blizzard is adding a twist to *StarCraft* with a third type of mission, which takes place within space stations. These scenarios contain light RPG elements, which might require players to break through a line of defensive weapons by deactivating a computer terminal.

> **'In the Warcraft series, we approached units similar to chess pieces...'**

Tactical Combat Realism

StarCraft will also offer a new level of tactical combat realism. For instance, line of sight enhances fog of war by allowing players to use the terrain to stage sneak attacks. Elevated terrain, multiple weapon systems and unlimited technology upgrades all add to the mix of real-time action and strategic planning.

Production queues for buildings allow players easier control over their bases' productivity while command queues for units simplify the assignment of a series of orders in the field.



World-Class Multiplayer

StarCraft's multiplayer game supports as many as eight players via *Battle.net*, Blizzard's free online game service. The ability for users to register unique names allows for a moderated worldwide ranking system, challenge ladders and tournaments. Handicapping enables players of varying experience levels to play the game together, while providing challenging gameplay for both opponents.

Full Featured Campaign Editor

The map editor in *WarCraft II* was wildly popular among gamers, and Blizzard is taking it to the next level in *StarCraft*. In fact, it is much more than just a map editor, it is a full-featured campaign editor. Players can make their own single and multiplayer scenarios and then string them together to make complete campaigns.

As *StarCraft* readies for release, it is clear that gamers have a lot to look forward to this holiday season. The game combines the intuitive nature of *WarCraft II* with a new design, incredible graphics and free eight-player Internet support. Get sleep while you can; the wait for *StarCraft* is almost over. ■

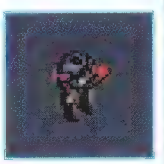
Species: TERRAN

The Terran colonies were originally settled by a small group of humans exiled from Earth generations ago for long-forgotten crimes. They have desecrated and pillaged the barren worlds they inhabit on the galactic rim in their struggle for survival. The Terrans' ongoing search for resources and fuel has led to territorial disputes and technology struggles among colonies, and the violence has spilled into the region claimed by the neighboring Protoss. As the Terrans' industrial bases encroach on the Protoss, conflict between the two species is inevitable. Although the Protoss possess superior technology, the Terran's tenacity and ingenuity cannot be under estimated.

With no homeworld to which they can return, the Terran's unscrupulous methods of survival have required that they become a nomadic society. As such, most core facilities are mobile, which allows the Terrans to uproot their settlements after depleting a planet's resources or when under enemy attack. When the Terran's scavenge new technology they can add-on to their research labs, weapons plants and factories. Though these auxiliary buildings are not portable, they are vital in providing the Terrans new technologies, such as cloaking.

TERRAN UNITS

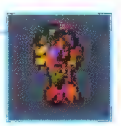
Marine



TYPE: Armored Infantry Trooper
GEAR: Pressurized Power Suit, Chain-gun Cannons

The first line of defense for many of the Terran colonies. Conditioned through Neural Resocialization to forsake their previous allegiances, Marines stand ready to defend the Terran Colonies with their lives. Stim Packs and grav-boots allow for flexible deployment.

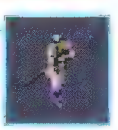
Firebat



TYPE: Armored Assault Trooper
GEAR: Pressurized Power Suit, Perdition's Flame Throwers

Like Marines, Firebat's are often 'resocialized' ex-criminals. Equipped with powerful, twin arm-mounted flame throwers, these fearless warriors serve as assault troopers in the various Terran Militias. Although the flame throwers have limited range, they cause considerable damage to everything caught in their fiery stream.

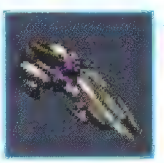
Ghost



TYPE: Espionage / Counterintelligence Agent
GEAR: Pressurized Enviromental Suit, C-10 Canister Rifle, Cloaking Field Generator

Used as spies and intelligence agents, Ghosts boast an environmental suit equipped with a personal cloaking field generator and a sophisticated sensor suite which can be used to coordinate nuclear strikes from the front lines.

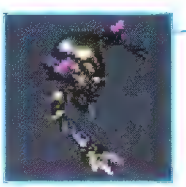
Vulture



TYPE: Hover Cycles
GEAR: Fragmentation Grenades, Spider Mines

Used primarily for scouting and sabotage, Vulture Hover Bikes can reach speeds of up to one hundred and eighty miles per hour. Anti-personnel fragmentation grenades and mobile spider mines allow riders to conduct lightning raids on enemy units.

Goliath



TYPE: Medium Support Combat Walker
ARMAMENT: Auto-Cannon, Scatter Missiles

The Goliath features all- terrain maneuverability with compu-based heavy weapons systems. The infamous Kel- Morian Mining Revolts demonstrated the effectiveness of even a small number of the versatile Combat Walkers in intensive urban warfare.

Arclite Siege Tank

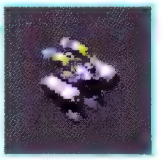
TYPE: Mobile Artillery Cannon
ARMAMENT: Mjolnir Artillery Cannon, Auto-Cannon

The heavily armored Arclite Siege Tanks are renowned throughout the Confederacy for their Cannon's unrelenting barrages of plasma-charged doom and their stalwart emplacement /advance tactics. When in siege mode, the tank is immobile, but highly effective against reinforce structure and vehicles.

SCV

TYPE: Space Construction Vehicle
ARMAMENT: Fusion Cutter

The pilot-controlled SCV is a versatile, hover-capable power-suit used for construction and resource gathering in hostile environments. Although not trained for combat, SCV pilots have been known to use their fusion cutters as weapons when in danger.



Dropship

TYPE: Armored Personnel Carrier
ARMAMENT: Vortex Shock-bombs

A vital part of colonial defense charged with delivering ground troops and their war-gear to combat zones. In order to secure landing areas, Dropships are equipped with powerful Vortex Shock-bombs.

Wraith

TYPE: Space Superiority Fighter
ARMAMENT: Gemini Air-to-Air Missiles, anti-armor burst laser

Versatile and dynamic, these high-speed fighters use superior mobility and single vessel cloaking field generators to strike at slow-moving targets and to engage enemy fighters.

The backbone of any Terran militia remains the lowly foot soldier.

Battlecruiser

TYPE: Behemoth-class Command Cruiser
ARMAMENT: Burst-Laser Batteries, Dual Nova Cannons, Yamato Cannon

The massive Behemoth class Battlecruisers are virtual flying fortresses. Outfitted with multiple turbo-laser batteries and Nova Cannons, these ships are easily the most powerful Colonial ships in space. Many Colonial generals use Battlecruisers as their command centers during long space campaigns.

Science Vessel

TYPE: Explorer-class Research Station
ARMAMENT: None

Many Colonies have placed Explorer Stations at strategic points throughout the galaxy to further study anomalous phenomena. Recently, as alien forces have begin to infringe upon Colonial space, Terran scientists have begun to use the Vessels for electronic warfare and combat support.

TERRAN BUILDINGS

Species: PROTOSS

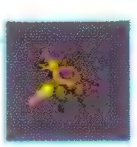
An ancient and powerful race, the mighty Protoss are the most advanced civilization inhabiting the galactic rim. Highly intelligent and gifted with great psionic powers, the Protoss share a special psychic connection with each other and their homeworld, Aiur. With training, a single Protoss can learn to tap this mental gestalt and use its power to enact a variety of physical effects, including the manipulation of space-time itself. The Templar, for example, can mentally form weapons and shields without a physical power source, while Scouts can effectively track and locate concealed ships using sensory technology.

To channel mental energy, the Protoss must construct a great crystal Nexus which links them to their remote homeworld, Auir. The Nexus powers both buildings and units. Pylons designed to conduct energy from the Nexus are required to expand a Protoss settlement. Attacking enemy troops often first seek to destroy this Protoss power supply, which cripples the species.

Gateways to Aiur teleport Protoss Carriers, Photon Cannons, Dragoons and other deadly military machinery. Protoss units exhibit remarkable speed, agility and strength, and regenerating shields provide a powerful line of defense. While the Protoss army is few in numbers, their strength is unmatched.

PROTOSS UNITS

Probe



TYPE: Light Defensive Robot

Protoss worker and resource gatherer. Robotic servant (peon) The Probe 'hovers', but does not fly over water or space. The Probe locks down teleport coordinates so that Protoss structures can be placed on the map.

Dragoon

TYPE: Medium Support Drone

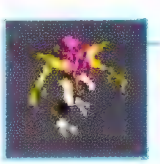
These large mechanical combat walkers provide essential cover fire for the Zealot forces by launching bolts of psychically charged energy into enemy lines.

Zealot

TYPE: Assault Trooper

Grafted with cybernetic enhancements and outfitted with the coveted Zealot Power-Suits, these young warriors represent the unbridled ferocity of the Protoss. The unit's primary weapon is deadly psionic blades protruding from its forearm.

High Templar



TYPE: Psionic Warrior

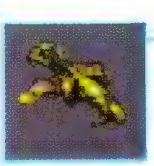
These volatile units radiate such powerful psionic energy that they are forbidden to enter combat physically for fear of them accidentally unleashing a massive catastrophe.

Archon

TYPE: Summoned Psychic Avatar

Powerful energy being. Created when three or more Protoss Templar sacrifice themselves and merge as one. Archon represents the might of the Protoss' psionic fury.

Scout

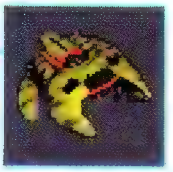


TYPE: High Speed Fighter

Through advanced technology and psionic powers, Scouts effectively track and locate concealed ships. Primarily used as point guards for Protoss fleets, Scouts can also engage any hostile enemy.

Shuttle

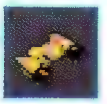
TYPE: Armored Transport/ Worker
Protoss flying transport. 'Nuff said.



Interceptor

TYPE: Light Robotic Attack Fighters

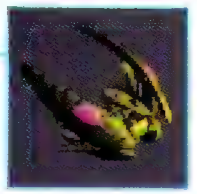
These maneuverable, computer guided units tear through enemy flight formations and relentlessly strafe slower targets with potent plasma-charges. Docked in the bays of the Carriers, a number of prepped Interceptors can be launched simultaneously into combat.



Arbiter

TYPE: Judicator Sanctum

Arbiter ships often accompany Protoss Warfleets into battle. The Templar use this unit as a psychic anchor to moor their astral manifestations to this reality. Arbiter ships and use psionic powers to hamper and destroy enemy Fleets.



Carrier

TYPE: Battle Cruiser/Command Ship

These units serve as command centers for the leaders of the Protoss fleets. Heavily armored and shielded, Carriers can punch their way through enemy blockades and unleash robotic flights of Interceptors at vital enemy targets.

The Protoss share a special psychic connection with each other and their homeworld, Aiur.

PROTOSS BUILDINGS

Species: ZERG

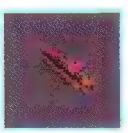
The origin of the Zerg is unknown, though Terran scientists theorize that the Zerg are bioengineered weapons. The only available data on the species are the remains of log entries, sensor records and debris found in wreckage of the swarm's merciless path of destruction. From this information, it is evident that the species has little or no use for known technology. Instead, the Zerg rely on a marked propensity for cruelty and hunger for destruction. All attempts at peaceful negotiations have been futile.

Locations that the Zerg inhabit become infested by a thick, living substance dubbed the Creep. Evidence suggests that Zerg is dependent on this resin for both propagating and creating structures. While the life span for many strains of the species is short, the Zerg can quickly multiply into deadly army by spawning Larva. During this gestation, the morphing Larva are left defenseless, and both the Terrans and the Protoss have attack plans to exploit this weakness.

The Zerg's ability to regenerate makes it imperative that the units be destroyed — not merely injured – in battle. With no light source and the ability to burrow, the Zerg are often known to attack without warning.

ZERG UNITS

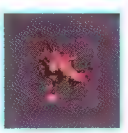
Larva



Type: Hive Spawn
Core Genus: Original Zerg Strain

These units spawn all other Zerg units. Larva cocoon and acquire the genetic matrix other Zerg strains within the swarm. After gestation, the Larva transform into advanced units.

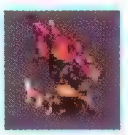
Zergling



Type: Light Assault Warrior
Core Genus: Zz'gashi Dune-runners

Small and savage, these dune-runners serve as scouts and initial assault troops. Zerglings benefit from increased speed when closing in upon their enemies. A single Larva can spawn into two separate Zerglings.

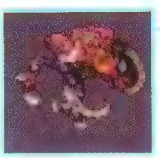
Hydralisk



Type: Medium Assault Warrior
Core Genus: Slothien

Spindly, snake-like Hydralisks house hundreds of armor piercing spines that can be fired in volleys at ground-based or flying enemy units. Hydralisks also have burrowing abilities for ambushing their unsuspecting prey.

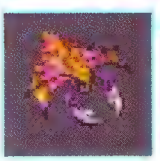
Ultralisk



Type: Heavy Assault Warrior
Core Genus: Brontolith

Large, bone-like scythes protrude from the Ultralisk's back, making the unit nearly indestructible and allowing it to easily tear through most known substances. Although the Ultralisks are slow moving, their destructiveness makes them the backbone of the Swarm's warriors.

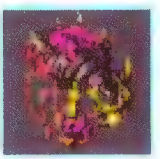
Drone



Type: Hive Worker
Core Genus: Gashyrr Wasp
Life Span: 2-3 weeks

These units' primary functions are resource gathering and morphing into rudimentary Zerg structures. Drones are usually very single-minded about orders, diligently working, even when raging combat erupts in their path.

Overlord



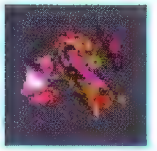
Type: Heavy Transport, Commander
Core Genus: Gargantis Proximae
Life Span: 6 years

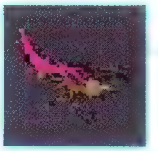
Overlords control and coordinate warriors during battle. They also serve as a transport for Zerg warriors. Benefiting from extra-sensory perception, Overlords can sense and identify hidden or camouflaged enemies.

Mutalisk

Type: Medium Attack Flyer
Core Genus: Mantis Screamer

The strongest of the hive's flying warriors, the Mutalisk possesses the ability to morph into an alternate defensive attack forms. Weaponry consists of powerful plasma projectiles that can penetrate reinforced armor plating.

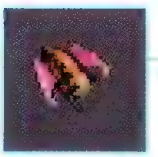




Guardian

Type: Medium Defensive Flyer
Core Genus: Mantis Screamer

The Guardian is the alternate form assumed by the Zerg Mutalisk. A more defensive mode, the Guardian benefits from a reinforced carapace shell for protection.



Queen

Type: Hive Warden
Core Genus: Arachnis Brood-Keeper

This unit protects the hive and oversee the Drone workers. Queens can infest other units and structures with crippling toxic plagues.

Defiler

Type: Unknown
Core Genus: Unknown

Easily the most horrific of the Swarm's warriors, Defilers breakdown other Zerg units' genetic chemistry to produce catastrophic effects. Using projected plasma bursts to defend themselves when attacked directly, the Defiler seldom enters into direct combat.

Avenger

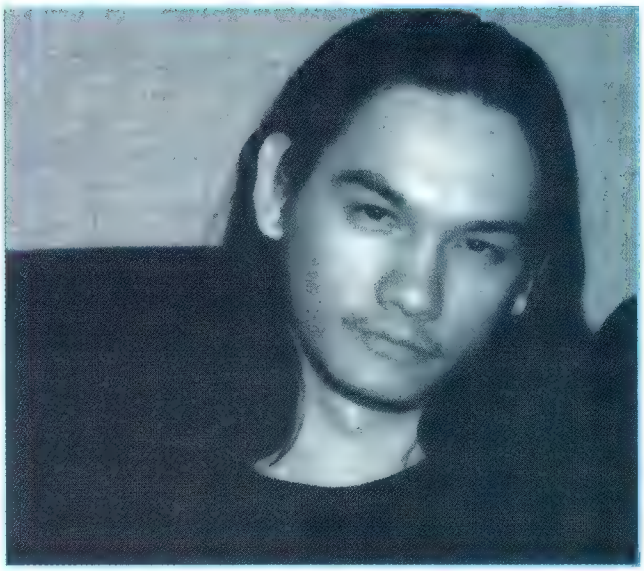
Type: High Speed Pursuer
Core Genus: None

Avengers are not spawned, but instead live as symbiotic parasites within Guardians and Overlords. When their host bodies die, the Avengers emerge to hunt down and eradicate the enemy that killed their host body. While their life span is short, their wrath is deadly.

Terran scientists theorize that the Zerg are bioengineered weapons.

ZERG BUILDINGS

BEHIND THE SCENES INTERVIEW WITH JAMES PHINNEY, STARCRAFT PRODUCER



1997 will be remembered by many in the gaming world as the year of real-time strategy. While many RTS games this year will be categorized as clones, a few will stand out as truly innovative. In an exclusive interview, *StarCraft* producer James Phinney discusses Blizzard's plans to break *StarCraft* away from the pack.

What are the key differences between *StarCraft* and Blizzard's last real-time strategy game, *Warcraft II*?
James Phinney: The biggest difference is that *Starcraft* features three inherently different species with unique units, buildings and abilities. Other new features include three combat environments, an easy-to-use campaign editor, multiplayer support for eight people and free Internet gaming via Battle.net.

As with other Blizzard titles, I understand that *StarCraft* includes an epic storyline. How will the story unfold?
Each race has 10 missions. As players experience the game from each race's perspective, they learn more about the conflict and each side's motivations. The chronology of the campaigns is sequential, so players get the full effect. Right now, the order is Terran, Zerg and then Protoss. The missions become more difficult with each race played, so we plan to disable the Protoss campaign unless the Zerg or Terran campaign has been finished.

Starcraft features three inherently different species with unique units, buildings and abilities.

Fog of war is a strategic element from Warcraft II that you are keeping for *StarCraft*. How will fog of war in *StarCraft* differ from the *Warcraft II* model?
To supplement the basic fog of war model used in *WarCraft II*, we have added line-of-sight, which takes terrain features and elevation into account when determining what areas to unmask. In addition, each side has units with stealth abilities, such as cloaking and burrowing, which may then be countered by enemy units with detection capabilities.

Will *StarCraft* have neutral characters independent of the three races?
Starcraft will include unique heroes similar to those in *WarCraft II*, plus a variety of neutral units – usually human - which are not allied exclusively to any one race. Players can interact with independent colonies, pirates, privateers, smugglers and ancient alien civilizations.

Does *StarCraft* have veteran units?
Yes. We plan to include methods for developing veteran units such as gaining experience, level up bonuses, naming units between missions and carrying units over from scenario to scenario.

How will the carrying over of units work?
We have designed the game to allow some units to carry over in single and multiplayer campaigns. For instance, if a Wraith pilot gets promoted to Colonel due to great heroics in one battle, then in the next battle, the

Wraith will begin as a Colonel, instead of a Second Lieutenant. As a Colonel, the unit will have slightly improved Evade, Accuracy and Damage.

What kind of multiplayer support will *StarCraft* offer?

Starcraft supports up to eight players via network or battle.net. The game will also offer head-to-head play over modem.

How will Battle.net be different for *StarCraft* than it was for Diablo?

The biggest new feature is registering unique battle.net IDs. This will ensure that people can develop their online persona without the threat of other players assuming the same screen name. In addition, each battle.net ID will have a customizable player profile and banner.

Another significant addition is the *StarCraft* ladder, which will allow for a global ranking system and tournaments.

Will observers be allowed in multiplayer games?

Yes, but with restrictions. We want to allow people to set up their own tournaments, multiplayer campaigns and training sessions, but we do not want observers to become a means for cheating, stealing tactics, or otherwise ruining anyone's play experience.

We are planning to allow observers to join the game during game set-up. Once in the game, any player can block observers from viewing their units. Messages sent by observers will go to all players. When a players dies, they automatically transition into observation mode.

What kind of alliances will be allowed?

There are several different kinds – all of which fall into two basic categories: teams and allies. Teams are fixed in the game set-up and can share resources and units. Teams always share intelligence, such as fog of war.

Allies can be changed throughout the course of the game and can have non-aggression, shared intelligence, and, of course, allied victory. The interface for allies will be much like it was for *WarCraft II*.

StarCraft features three inherently different species with unique units, buildings and abilities. ■

STARCRAFT INTERFACE

Minimap
Color coded cues on the map alert the players when units are being attacked or when units or buildings have completed construction.

Command Buttons
Highlighted buttons indicate available options and context-sensitive pop-up help explains resource costs and technology requirements.

Wire Frame
Wire frames provide a visual representation of a unit's health. If applicable, information about shields is also displayed. If multiple units are selected, smaller wire frames appear depicting each member of the group.

Production Queue
A new feature in Starcraft is the option to queue. Players can issue each unit up to five different orders. Commands can be deleted or moved.

Communication Transceiver
Incoming messages keep players updated on unit activities and ongoing battles. Pressing the space bar centers the screen on the area where the message originated, making it easier to respond quickly.

BATTLE.NET - THE NEXT GENERATION OF MULTIPLAYER

Last year, Blizzard challenged the gaming industry by offering multiplayer gaming over the Internet -- FREE. "Nobody thought we could pull it off," says Blizzard President Allen Adham, "but as gamers, we knew had to." In less than a year, more than one million unique users have played in excess of 20 million games of Diablo over *Battle.net*. Based on the phenomenal response from game fans, *Battle.net* now reigns as the largest Internet game service in the world. "Gamers want an easy, free, quality Internet connection to their favorite games," says Adham, "and *Battle.net* delivers". But, Blizzard isn't stopping there. With the imminent release of *Starcraft*, Blizzard is readying its next wave of Battle.net enhancements.

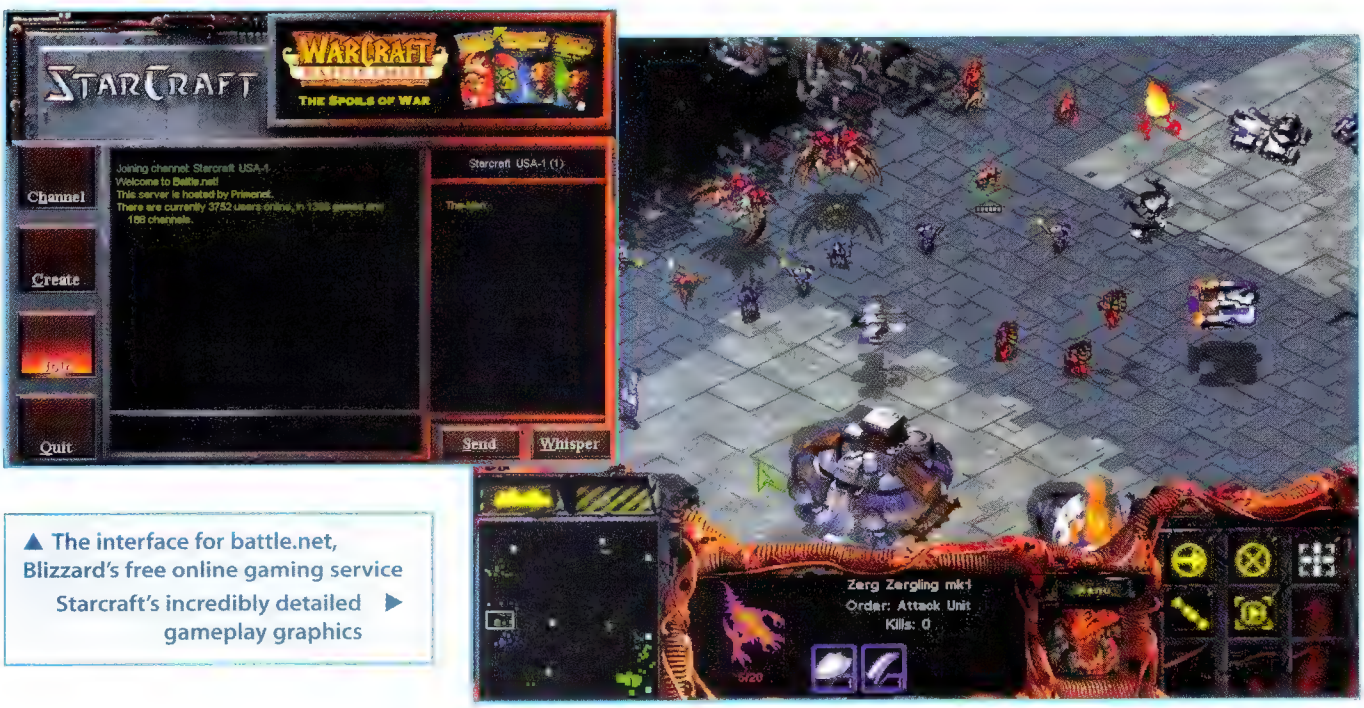
In its simplest form, *Battle.net* provides a matchmaking service for Blizzard customers to chat, challenge opponents and initiate multiplayer games. But to the million plus gamers who play over the service, *Battle.net* is a community where gamers meet not only to play games, but to share experiences, swap strategies and confirm the latest rumor.

Gamers want a quick, quality Internet connection to their favorite games - and they want it for free.

Starcraft fans can expect a slew of new multiplayer features to heighten their online experience. The addition of unique player IDs, for example, broadens *Battle.net*'s capabilities substantially. By offering a system to protect players online personas, gamers can build their online character and reputation. Player profiles display information about rank, group affiliation, game statistics and other game data.

Registered screen names also allows for a moderated worldwide ranking system determined by challenge ladders and tournaments. The structure operates similar to chess ladders, where a player is unranked until having played a certain number of games, then gains points by beating others – the better the opponent the more points gained.

In team and ally play, gamers compete cooperatively, sharing information, resources and units. Multiplayer campaigns will be available for download or players can create their own using *Starcraft*'s campaign editor. And, for players with different skill levels, handicap-



▲ The interface for battle.net, Blizzard's free online gaming service

Starcraft's incredibly detailed gameplay graphics ▶

ping provides challenging experiences for both the veteran and novice.

Blizzard's vision for *Battle.net* is a global network. The company is partnering with international Internet service providers in major markets around the world such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Australia and Japan. Blizzard is also localizing the *Battle.net* interface for the native languages in major international markets.

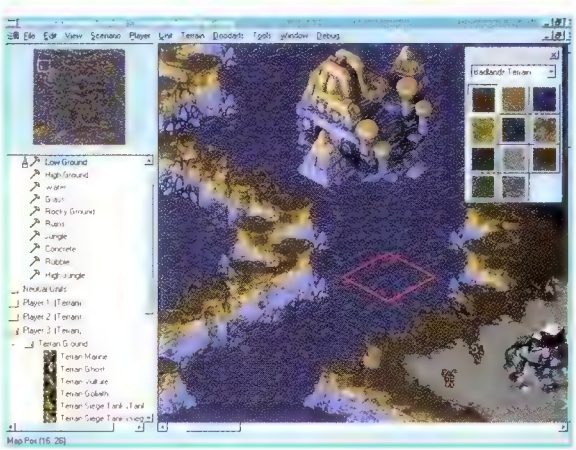
Blizzard's vision for battle.net is a global network that spans the world.

Even as Blizzard continues to improve its online offerings, the company is careful not to lose sight of the most important aspect of multiplayer gaming: superb content. Quality, addictive gameplay is always the number one draw for gamers. And, that is ultimately *Battle.net*'s key to success. ■

ALL-NEW EDITOR PUTS THE POWER OF DESIGN IN PLAYERS' HANDS

Game players by nature want the opportunity to extend their favorite gaming experience. Level editors have satiated this desire in recent years by allowing the creation of new maps. But, now, Blizzard is pushing the concept one step further by handing over its entire library of design tools to players. With the company's all-new editor, players will not only be able to build maps and levels, but entire campaigns.

Starcraft's fully functional editor gives player all the necessary tools to design single and multiplayer campaigns. Players can mix-and-match everything from the type of terrain and the style of play to the number of races and the objectives. Custom speech, sound, text and hero characters are just a few of the elements that can be added to scenarios.



Players can create a single map with a simple seek-and-destroy objective or they can string together a series of requirements with trigger points for multiple maps and events. To set victory parameters, players select from predefined lists of objectives.

As impressive as the list of features is the editor's ease of use. The simple click-and-drag interface, makes map designing easy for even novices. Split-window editing allows players to view two different regions of map at the same time. Multiple levels of undo and redo commands makes editing maps seamless.

THE SAGA CONTINUES...

WARCRAFT ADVENTURES

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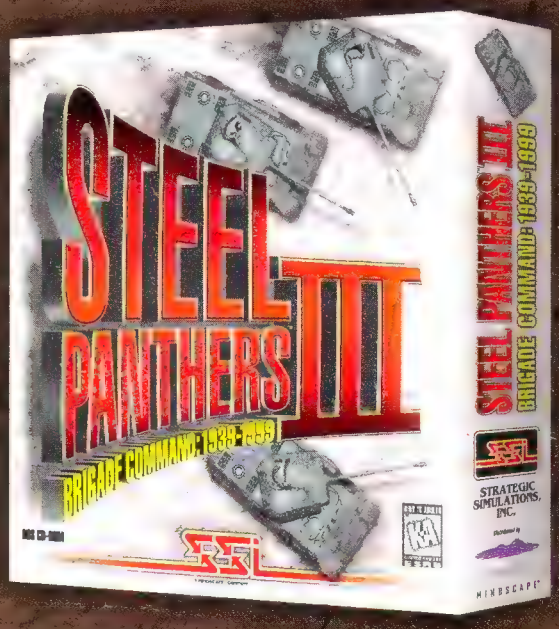

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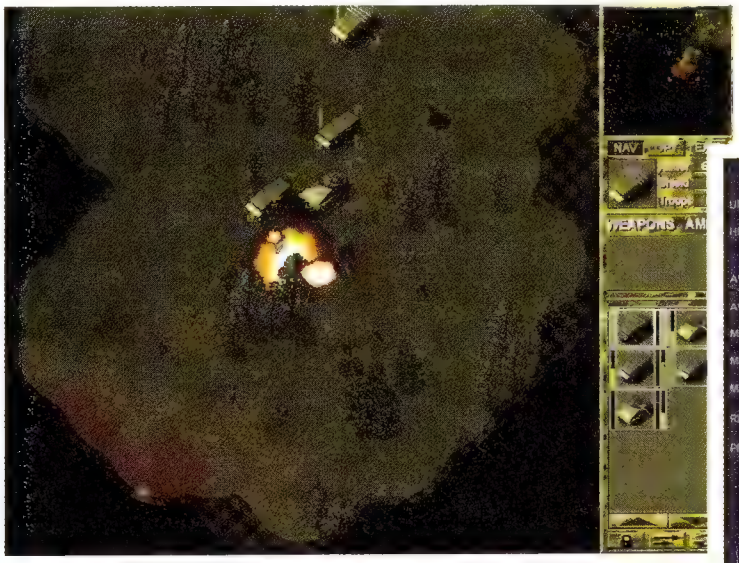
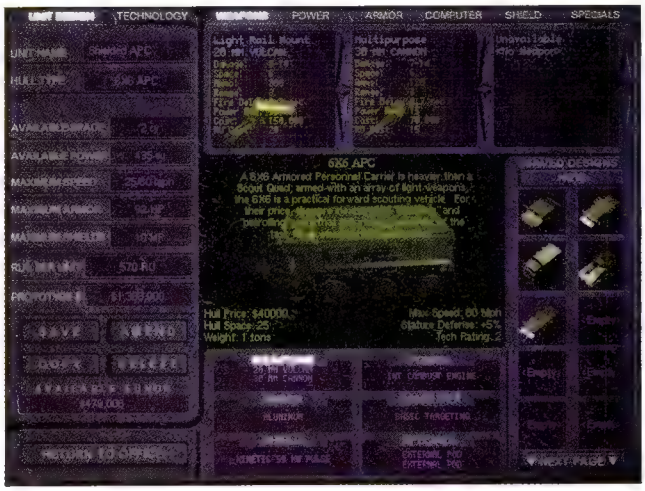
WAR, Inc.

Coulda, woulda, shoulda (been a classic)





[left to right]

Vehicles have a tough time maneuvering amongst the trees, making them easy pickings for massed infantry

Early in the game, this shielded APC with a 20mm Vulcan Gun cuts through enemy troops like a hot knife through butter

Recently on an online gaming forum, someone described *WAR, Inc.* by saying it had great potential, but could have stood another month of polishing. A lone voice replied, "Oh no, not again."

Yes, again. Whether caused by the rush to catch the end of a fiscal quarter, or by design specs that outstrip budgets, or for reasons too arcane for a mortal reviewer to grasp, it seems like the market is being flooded by games that "missed it by THAT much."

In this case, developer Optic used a two layered approach in an attempt to combine the real-time strategy (RTS) aspects of a *Clone & Conquer* game (the "inner" game) with the economic strategy of running a business (the "outer" game). The business in question is a mercenary outfit, and it's a brilliant concept. Rather than swarm the enemy with units, you're always thinking of the bottom line. What are the minimal resources needed to accomplish the mission at hand, and thus maximize profit margins? It gives the game a real edge.

Another stroke of brilliance was allowing players to design their own units. In the outer game, you'll spend money on researching many new and wonderful technologies. But in order to use these, you'll have to design a blueprint of a unit incorporating them. Combine a hull with weapons, armor, shields, and so on, then spend a wad of cash on developing a prototype. Thereafter, in the RTS section of the game, your vehicle factories can churn this new unit out in droves.

As well as developing new units and technologies in the outer game, you'll also want to play the stock market. War is expensive, and while in theory you can get by on just the profits made by successful campaigns, life will be a lot easier if you're money is making money while you're waiting for that next contract.

When the contract finally arrives, you'll get to the meat of the game. Rather than being dumped into the usual tactical RTS map, you'll find yourself on an area map showing the location of your headquarters as well as the objectives required for this campaign. You then drill down to the Headquarters tactical map, and start building a base.

Resources here consist of cash (you have access to all your liquid assets) and Resource Units (RUs), which are generated by mining ore. When you've built up your HQ infrastructure and sufficient forces, it's time to go after those objectives. By exiting the headquarters map, you'll return to the area map, move units into a task force and send them to an objective location. When they arrive, you'll once again drill down to a fairly typical RTS tactical map. Once you completed all objectives on the area map, the campaign ends and you'll get payment, plus reimbursement for the buildings and RUs you've left on the various maps and be returned to the outer game.

The devil, they say, is in the details, and it is in the details that *WAR, Inc* falls down. From an installation routine that doesn't warn of insufficient drive capacity, to the lack of documentation, to the sometimes clumsy interface, this game would have strongly benefited from some focus-group testing. The stock market is either random or affected by forces not apparent, with the result that you'll probably save/invest/restore until you find a winning stock. In the RTS section of the game, unit AI is sometimes horrible, with units getting stuck behind trees, or sitting quietly while the enemy attacks, never attempting to defend themselves.

Most frustrating is the way your team is whisked away from the field of battle as soon as you meet mission objectives. Leaving behind several million dollars worth of installations when you're strapped for cash can be very disheartening. It would've made for a much more user friendly experience if you were given some warning so that you could sell off unneeded buildings and recover the capital to use for the next objective.

So yes, it's happened again. The clever folks at Optic thought up a unique and exciting twist to the RTS genre, but somewhere along the way, things went slightly wrong. A patch is being discussed, which may go a long ways towards improving the game, but as always *caveat emptor*. Also, the Interactive Magic forums (www.imagicgames.com) have some valuable data that should've been in the documentation. The point being, if you work at it, *WAR Inc* can be great fun. But, in the densely populated world of *Clone & Conquer* games, it may be easier to just move on to something else. *–Peter Smith*

★★★☆☆

WAR, Inc.

Interactive Magic • www.imagicgames.com • Requirements: DOS, 90 MHz Pentium, 16 MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: Real-time section only, 2-6 players, LAN, modem

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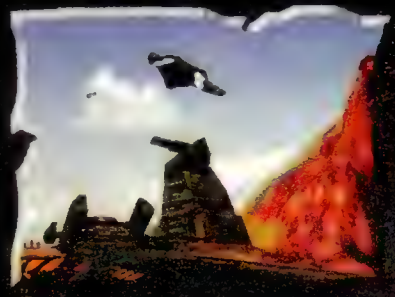
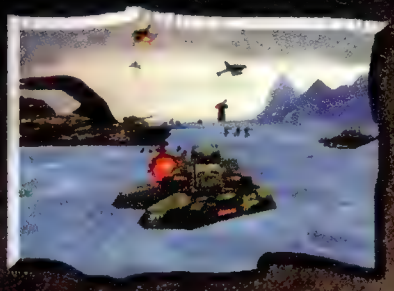
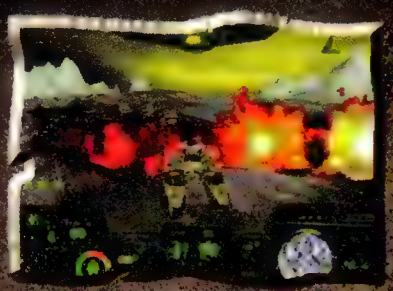


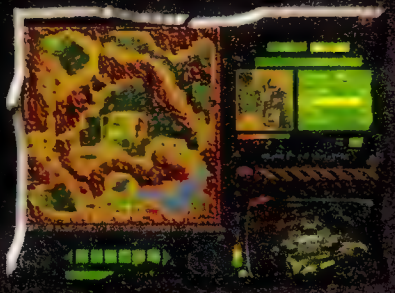
[STUNNING 3-D GRAPHICS]



[INTENSE MULTIPLAYER]

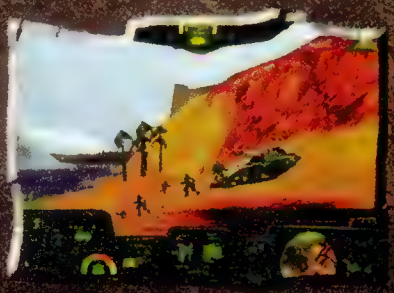


[MASS-SCALE DESTRUCTION]



[STRATEGIC DEPTH]

[HEART-POUNDING ACTION]



[COMMAND ENTIRE ARMIES]

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Achtung Spitfire!

Bigtime's finest hour

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

Achtung Spitfire! (Avalon Hill's and Bigtime Software's follow-up to *Over the Reich*) is a turn-based wargame whose action takes place in the air over WWII Europe. It covers the most dramatic air battle of all time, the Battle of Britain. For those unfamiliar with Bigtime's air war games, this is *not* a flight simulator; it is a primarily tactical wargame.

[clockwise from the top of page]

A large aircraft database is provided for comparing performance parameters

This German bomber won't make it back across the channel

A German bomber sortie slips through British defenses

The player is presented with options to play from a British, French or German perspective. One can choose to set up a dogfight, play a series of historical missions, or try to survive Tours of Duty. These latter campaigns include the Battle of France as the French, the entire air war from the onset of hostilities in 1939 through 1943, when the Americans arrived in force, as either the British or German commander, or the actual Battle of Britain, again from either the British or German perspective. A very nice touch is the ability to transfers squadrons that have survived *Achtung Spitfire!* until 1943 into *Over the Reich*.

Play is at the level of individual pilots and planes; each pilot is rated for experience and may have a number of additional attributes, such as superb eyesight, marksmanship, excellent flying skills, hero status, etc., which have significant effects on how effective each pilot is. A simple addition that adds immensely to the immersion factor is the ability to rename all of your pilots.

Actual gameplay is deceptively easy: you basically decide the moves that you wish for each plane in your squadron, then attempt to execute them with a simple point and click interface. At the higher complexity levels the sequence of movement is determined by an initiative system that takes into account pilot skill and relative positioning. While the game is extremely easy to play, it would be a mistake to decide the game itself is overly simple, a mistake that is usually realized after being completely wiped out by the computer a few times. Decisions abound for the human commander: do I risk a high G turn that provides a high probability shot, at the risk of damaging the aircraft? Should I fire a full, extended blast at the risk of jamming my guns or fire a safer, shorter burst? Should the non-fuel injected Spitfire try a negative G maneuver that will provide great positioning but cause a momentary loss of power? Add to these tactical combat decisions the choices the player must make as squadron commander, such as rotating tired pilots in and out of combat, selecting which combinations of rookies and aces to send up, deciding the number of plane to send on a sortie, etc., and you have a very rich wargame, one in which the player's decisions have an immediate and dramatic effect on the outcome.

While single missions are available, the full flavor of *Achtung Spitfire!* is only appreciated in the Tour of Duty campaigns, in which the player attempts to bring a squadron of pilots through a series of missions over an extended portion of the war. While most of the campaigns have the general nature of tree based missions (with variability in terms of what opposition one will face on each mission), the heart of *Achtung Spitfire!* is the actual Battle of Britain. This Tour of Duty allows the player to take command of a squadron and attempt to recreate (for the British) or change (for the German) history. From the British perspective, a typical day involves the reception of contact reports (from either radar sites or coastal watchers) and decisions on which ones to intercept, a task made difficult due to limited numbers of planes and weary pilots. Is the contact heading down the coast a well escorted flight of bombers, intent on destroying a crucial airfield, or perhaps Galland's deadly Bf-109s on a fighter sweep? If the British player commits his resources to an early contact, all of his planes may be caught on the ground refueling while German sorties freely bomb the English countryside. On the German side of the Channel, commanders must decide sortie compositions and targets. This strategic element provides the game with that "up until 2:00 a.m." dimension that all great wargames possess.

While there are a few very minor nits to pick (where are the medals; it would be nice if a few more targets were available in England), *Achtung Spitfire!* takes a solid wargaming system to the next level. Highly recommended. *–Jeff Lackey*

★★★★½

Achtung Spitfire!

Avalon Hill • www.avalonhill.com • Requirements: Windows, 486 or higher, 8 MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM; MacOS, System 7 or higher, 68040 or higher, 8 MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2 players, Internet, play-by-e-mail

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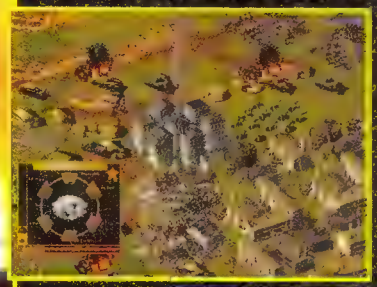

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Man of War

Firing off a broadside in 3D

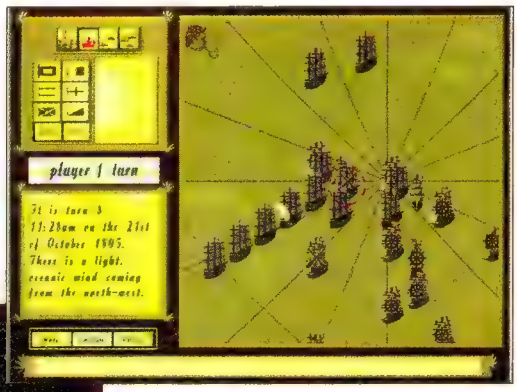
"Engage the enemy more closely," was reportedly the favorite battle signal of Horatio Nelson. *Man of War* offers gamers the chance to step onto Nelson's quarterdeck and issue these very same orders. Developer Strategy First has impressively raised the bar on Age of Sail simulations by providing a convincing 3D-first-person environment in which to battle.

Unlike previous attempts to simulate the Age of Sail, which focused on micromanaging the duties of a ship's captain, *Man of War* places the player in the position of overall squadron or fleet commander. This has made the implementation of large battles such as Trafalgar far more manageable. The game is turn-based with orders being plotted on an elegant tactical map; once orders are plotted the game shifts to a first-person view in which to watch the action unfold.

In the 3D resolution phase, the player can stroll the deck of his ship from quarter to fore decks while the battle rages. Though *Man of War's* first-person engine is primitive compared to current action games like *Quake*, it does get the job done. Sails will slack and billow, cannons roar with accompanying fire and smoke, splinters fly while masts come crashing down. The sounds of timbers creaking, gulls squawking, and the sight of the deck rising and falling all give a great impression of being at sea. The sea and sky are truly beautiful in dawn and twilight engagements. Unfortunately, there is no option to pan up or down and it's lonely being in command—so lonely, there's no one else on deck.

Turns are four minutes in length, with options for time compression. During the orders phase, the player has a choice of picking signal flags to issue orders to his command. There are fifteen different orders available which accurately reflects most of the choices a flag officer had in controlling a fleet. These can be issued to single ships, divisions, or the entire fleet. As with history, combat situations often find individual ship captains doing things that make you think they've been hitting the grog too much.

A frustrating omission with the signals is a lack of an easy way to implement a column-turn. This is where the lead ship of a column will turn and the following ships will attempt to make the same turn at the precise location where the lead ship changed course. This inclusion would have made managing a fleet of ships even easier.



[top to bottom]

Orders are given via signal flags on the tactical map

A telescope view is available

The game includes twelve scenarios which cover most of the major naval engagements between 1765-1815, though the Nile and Copenhagen are absent. A campaign game ten scenarios long has the player working his way up to larger and more important engagements as a British officer. A flexible scenario editor is available which allows the easy creation of additional actions. The editor includes options for land and shoal placement. Ships are provided in general categories, such as ship-of-the-line, large cruiser, etc., with the player rounding out the details of names, gun totals, crew quality and related factors.

Time for some *grognard* gripes. Control-obsessed types will be disappointed with the inability to pick shot types, crew assignments, hull or sail targeting, and no control over melee actions. That's the captain's job, not yours, flag officer. Reload rates seem inflated. British ships routinely fire three broadsides in a four minute turn. Dual broadsides occur frequently, though historically they were rare. Ships are rated by gun totals; shot weights as well as cannon and carronade distinctions are not addressed overtly. There is no tool to easily measure range. If these factors are extremely important to you, subtract a star from the game's rating.

The game's A.I. is generally adequate and at times strong. Multiplayer options are available with direct modem, local networks (IPX), and null modem connections. Surprisingly, there are no options for PBEM or Internet play.

Despite some rough edges, *Man of War* takes Age of Sail enthusiasts somewhere they haven't really gone before: actually pacing the quarterdeck of a tall fighting ship.
–Chuck Klimushyn

[left to right]

Never has Age of Sail combat looked so good

"Second star to the right and straight on till morning"

★★★★☆

Man of War

Strategy First, Inc. • www.strategyfirst.com • Requirements: DOS, 60 MHz Pentium or higher, 8MB RAM (16 MB under Windows 95), 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2 players, LAN, modem, serial, hot-seat

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Entrepreneur

Stardock gets down to business

Stardock was a great boon to us misguided but fervent OS/2 adherents. Their mediocre *Galactic Civlizations* achieved cult-hit status by being one of the only games written for our precious doomed operating system. Now that the battle's been fought and Windows 95 is the victor, it comes as no surprise that the subject of Stardock's newest game is the ruthless competition among computer companies. Entrepreneur bills itself as a wargame of sorts, with salesmen, marketing campaigns, factories, and research as the tools of warfare.

Right out of the gate, *Entrepreneur* earns points for being unique. Comparisons to Interactive Magic's *Capitalism* are inevitable, but whereas *Capitalism* is a dry and occasionally tedious simulation, *Entrepreneur* is a brisk, energetic, and entertaining game. Its approach to the world of business is lively and imaginative, playing out like a combination of *Risk, Civilization*, and *Magic: the Gathering*. The map is divided into regions and the point of the game is to claim the largest market share in the most regions. Your means to this end is a single product, a computer, which you can adapt to certain regions' preferences through technological updates. Research new CPUs, RAM, and hard drives for increased Reliability, hone your operating system for greater Ease of Use, or shrink your components into a mini-tower for better Aesthetics. A detailed product screen allows you to fine tune your computer; unfortunately, this is one of the areas poorly explained in the documentation.

The different kinds of companies (each company excels in either labor, engineering, or marketing) require different strategies, which is one of the subtleties of the game. The balance that has to be struck among the different aspects of a business is at the heart of *Entrepreneur*. Action cards can be played to occasionally throw this balance one way or the other. Certain regions give you resources when you control them, which can be spent playing from a hand of randomly drawn cards. These cards are great in theory, but most of them are underpowered, adding only minor twists to the game, and overpriced, making them hard to play. The variety of cards keeps them fresh, but the effects of many of them aren't clearly explained.

For some reason, *Entrepreneur* is a real-time game, but it advances in week-long chunks that may as well be turns. The amount of micromanagement required to run your company efficiently makes it necessary to pause the game when you want to fiddle around, since timing is crucial when it comes to building new facilities, investigating regions, and queuing research projects. This makes it a "pause-tinker-unpause" game that might as well be turn-based.

One of the biggest problems with the game is also one of its greatest assets: complexity. It has a steep learning curve, but even after you've mastered its mechanics, the detail can be overbearing. Color-coded filters are helpful at sorting out the map, but the game needs more detailed and comprehensive reports. As it is, there's no convenient way to keep track of resources on the map, salesmen, marketing campaigns, and the specs of your competitors' products. In many cases only coarse graphs and bar charts are provided where raw numbers would be more helpful. The documentation is often vague, providing little information about some things (What does morale do? How do you make sure to keep training new salesmen? How do a region's bonuses affect the game?) and no information about others (How is a company's prestige determined? What is the significance of productivity in a region? What is a DU?). In addition, the documentation is riddled with embarrassing typos and errors.

But *Entrepreneur*'s complexity is also part of why it's so engaging. A lot of the game is spent analyzing the situation and planning your approach. It's uniquely satisfying to see your scheming come to fruition as you edge out the competition. But its also extremely frustrating to see your business collapse like a house of cards. Once you start to appreciate the why's and wherefore's behind victory and defeat, *Entrepreneur* will keep you coming back to try to do better next time. In addition to a stable of solid AI opponents (Stardock has a reputation for programming formidable AIs that don't cheat), there are options to play against humans, made particularly convenient through Stardock's server. But the pause-tinker-unpause nature of *Entrepreneur*'s gameplay makes it ill-suited to multiplayer games.

Nonetheless, *Entrepreneur*'s approach to a topic that many players might find dull is refreshing. It's easy to make an exciting game about shotguns, air strikes, dragons, or race cars; but it takes the special talent on hand at Stardock to make an exciting game about print ads, upgraded RAM chips, market penetration, and salesmen. *–Tom Chick*

[clockwise from above]

Action cards are a clever, but somewhat underpowered, twist

Salesmen and marketing campaigns are moved around the map like armies

Your offices are HQs for production, sales, research, and marketing campaigns

★★★½☆

Entrepreneur

Stardock • www.stardock.com • Requirements: Windows 95, OS/2, 486/75 or higher, 12MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN

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Prelude to Waterloo

The battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras

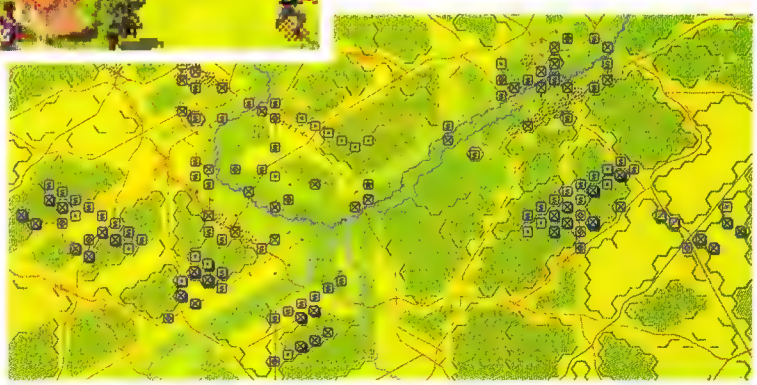
COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

Prelude to Waterloo, the *Battleground* series finale, is deserving of a standing ovation. The expansive scope that distinguishes this much-anticipated release from TalonSoft should please many Napoleonic-era game players and series fans. Not only does this new game cover the twin battles of Quatre Bras and Ligny in their entirety, but it allows players to carry forward their orders-of-battle into the *Battleground 3: Waterloo* game module. Within the limitations of the *Battleground* design, you can now experience a major portion of the Waterloo campaign in an unprecedented fashion.

The most visually impressive feature is the enormous and splendid map that places these two geographically separated battles within a unified panorama. There hasn't been a recent PC game that presented these battles as a combined scenario, allowing players to experience the full military significance of June 16th, 1815. Earlier attempts from *The Battles of Napoleon* (SSI) and *Fields of Glory* (Spectrum HoloByte) depicted these two battles as independent events. Although *Fields of Glory* bundled the Waterloo Campaign battles (including the Battle of Warve) into one box, it remained a disjointed affair. *Prelude to Waterloo* exceeds them both by giving players the most comprehensive look yet at these two critically aligned battles.

Since these two battles were very different in character, you may prefer to play them as individual scenarios. The Battle of Quatre Bras was a British delaying action with wildly fluctuating odds as one side or the other would enjoy numerical advantages throughout the day. As the French player, you get to experience the slow going through the fields of tall rye and the dense forest of the Bossu Wood. Can you avoid one of Wellington's feared flank ambushes as you chase the British from one chateau or tree to the next? On the other hand, Ligny was more of a set-piece battle. The Prussians have barricaded themselves among the several hamlets and villages along the swollen Ligny Brook. The French player has the difficult task of rooting out the Prussians and then trying to cross the well-guarded bridges. This will be no easy task in the face withering artillery fire from the massive Prussian artillery park on the heights above. When playing these battles together as one scenario, you will definitely be stretching your command abilities to the limit as you try to coordinate these two very dissimilar tactical situations.

There are also numerous scenarios covering individual actions at Ligny and St. Armand, as well as plenty of exciting historical variations. A superior "what if" scenario explores one of the great unanswered questions in history regarding the countermanded French First Corps. What would have happened if D'Erlon had not spent the day marching back and forth in between the battlefields, but had actually been committed to one or both actions? A couple of interesting scenarios based upon some preliminary engagements set on the Belgian frontier during June 15th enhance the game package. There are also three "Art of War" scenarios requiring the Extreme Fog of War Option. These special AOW scenarios hide reinforcement and release schedules, while varying arrival times from the historical. This creates the tactical dilemma of having to do your best with what is at hand without the guarantee of any predictable reinforcement.



[clockwise from top]
The French prepare to assault Ligny
Just a small portion of the Ligny battlefield
St. Armand under siege

The game also employs the same fixes and upgrades that have refined both previous releases of *Napoleon in Russia* and *Waterloo* through the most recent patches. TalonSoft's current support for this series has been phenomenal compared with the industry standard. Despite customer grumblings with some minor order-of-battle errata and a couple of debatable aspects in combat realism, the series has drawn quite a following from players and historians alike. It will be interesting to see if support for the now-concluded series will produce additional patches to fine tune any future problems.

Prelude to Waterloo is an exceptional adaptation of the twin battles that figured just as heavily in determining Napoleon's destiny as did the more well known Battle of Waterloo, two days later on June 18th. The artwork for the map of the Belgian countryside is as remarkable as it is pleasing to view. The historical research for the game from Scott Bowden's book *Armies at Waterloo* and the archival material of David Hamilton-Williams demonstrates a sincere attention to detail. The portability of the order-of-battle data to *Waterloo*, in effect, delivers additional variety within that game set as well. This final salute is without a doubt the best game TalonSoft has produced within this design, and it is regrettable that the series will be ending with so many historical applications remaining yet unrealized. *–Mark McIntosh*

★★★★★

Prelude to Waterloo
TalonSoft • www.talonsoft.com • Requirements: Windows, 486DX or higher, 8MB of RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2 players, Internet, modem, serial, PBEM

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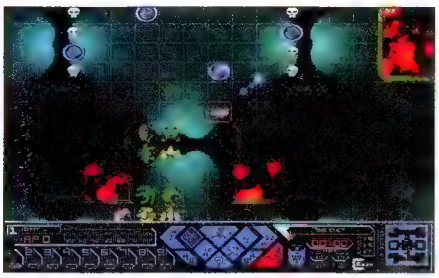
Crush Deluxe

Yet another turn-based alien sporting simulation

A turn-based sports game? We don't see many of those – in fact, the only one that comes to mind, *Blood Bowl* served if not as the inspiration, but at least the impetus, for *Crush Deluxe*. It's a gaming Cinderella story of a few guys saying "We can do better than that." and pulling together a shareware game, which was then picked up by a Megamedia.

The sport is called Crush, and it's a futuristic blend of football and hockey (maybe) played by various alien races. Matches take place in maze-like arenas filled with teleporters and traps. Players are moved one at a time, and can run, jump, check, and toss the ball. Mostly, they run and check other players. The ultimate goal is to carry the ball into the one active goal area. Since each team (there are three in a match) is trying to get the ball into the same goal, a nice funneling effect concentrates the action.

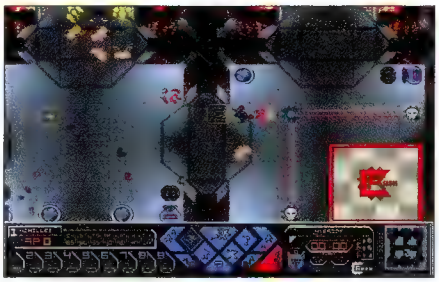
The blue and white circles are teleporters. They're how players enter the arena at the start of a match



As the name implies, Crush is a violent sport, and often a player who is checked will be injured or killed. At the end of a season, many teams will be working shorthanded due to death and dismemberment. In addition to their natural abilities, players can be equipped with illegal equipment. A player thus augmented risks being jettisoned from the game, but if he fools the ref the equipment might just give him the edge he needs.

Crush Deluxe contains exhibition, tournament and league play. You'll start by drafting a team, and between matches you can train players by using ability points they earn in the arena. Between seasons (for league play) you'll earn money to hire replacement players or buy equipment. This constant evolving of a team helps to keep interest high.

Crush Deluxe can best be described as "pleasant." It isn't a game that'll keep you glued to the PC for days on end, but it is certainly fun – a great "snack" game to sneak in between marathon sessions of the latest strategy blockbuster. *–Peter Smith*



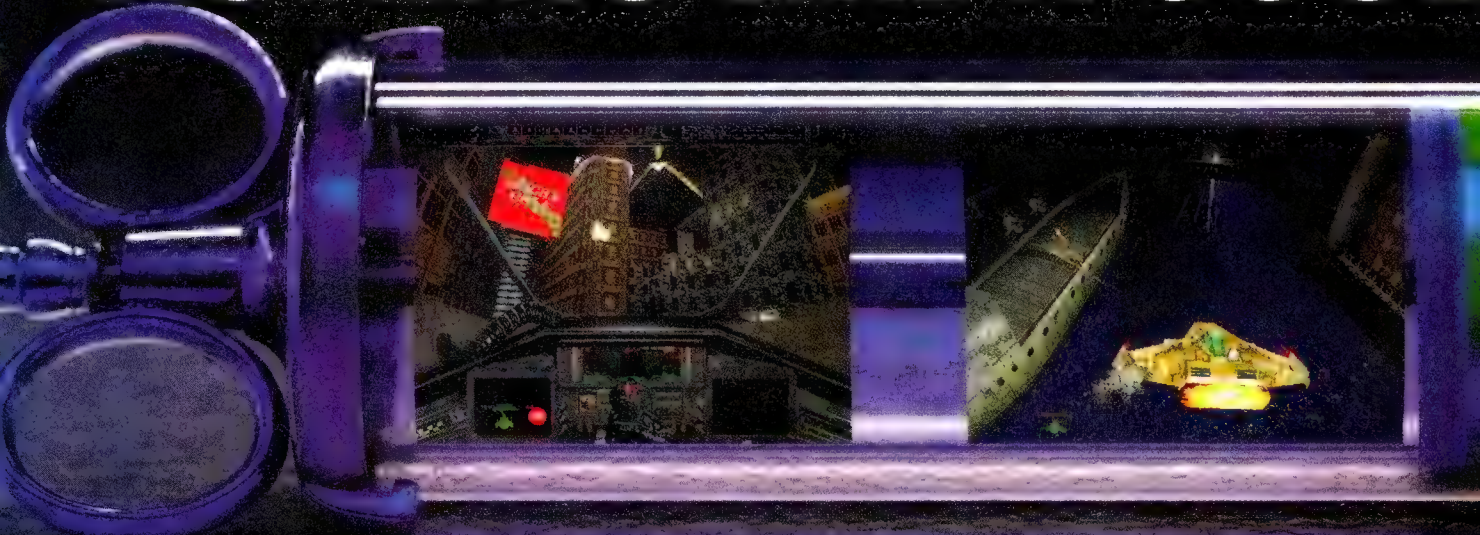
The guys in dark blue are setting up to defend the goal area. Note the knocked down red players

★★★☆☆

Crush Deluxe

Megamedia • www.megamedia.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 486DX2/66 or higher, 8MB of RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 1-3 per match, 12 per league, Internet (via Mplayer), hotseat

NOTHING LIKE A GOOD



First, there's the rush. Six degrees worth of it. Coming or going? Who knows. But you're at the center of this suicide mission and whether you like it or not (you do), you know you've gotta get this rage out of your system, or you may end up in a splatter self-destruction (not to mention world-wide devastation). With the weapons, raids, assassinations and other assorted chaos-can of Adrenix thrashing your every molecule, you don't have to descend to get down and dirty. It'll take you in all directions at onc But that's you. All over the place.

Spells of the Ancients

MicroProse throws us a tasty bone

Spells of the Ancients is just a little something to tide us over before MicroProse's computer adaptation of *Magic the Gathering* really comes into its own, when the promised multiplayer capability should breathe new and long life into the game. But for the time being, you'll have to make do with about 130 new cards and sealed deck tournaments.

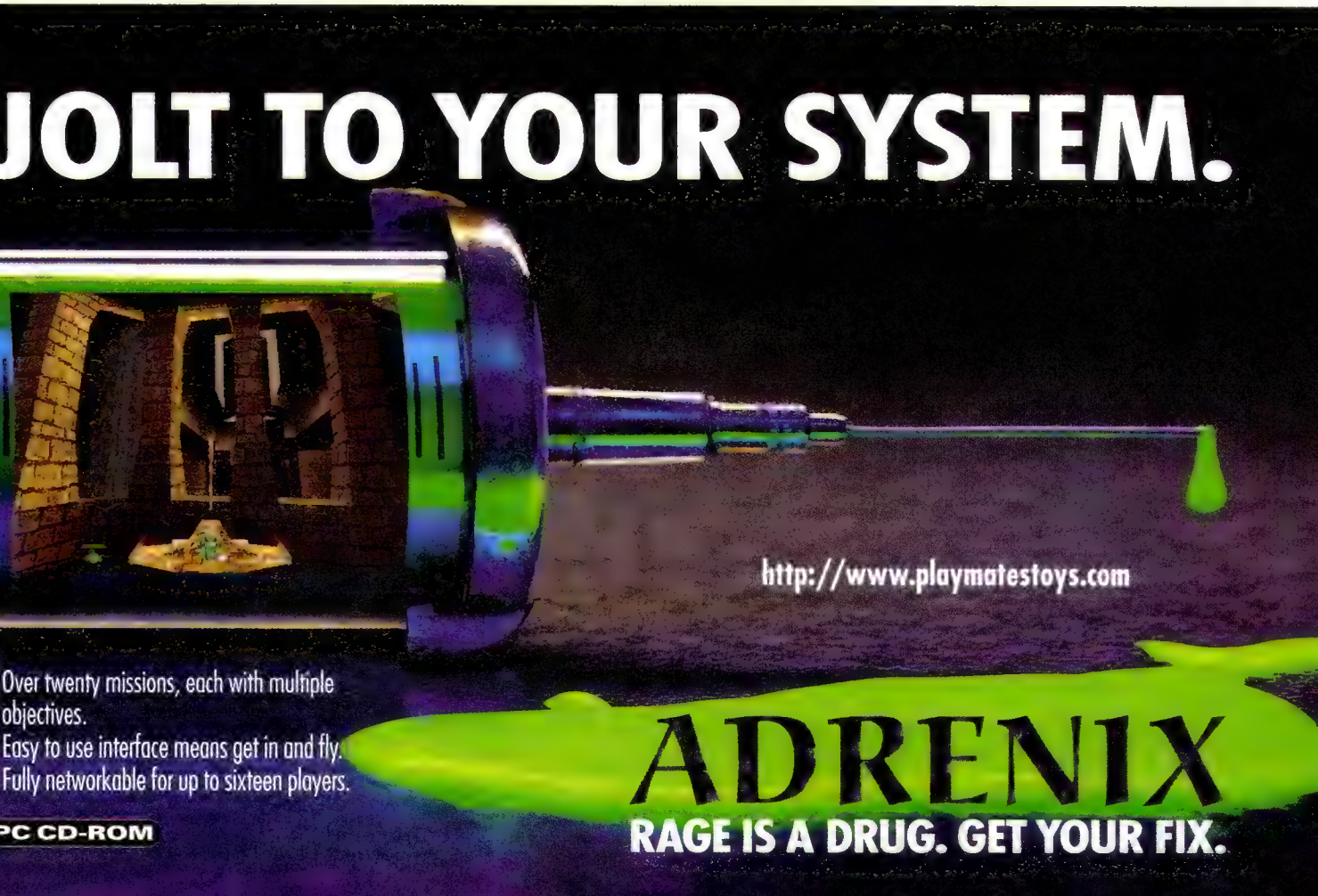
You can now customize your wizard's appearance (for anyone who cares about that sort of thing)

The new cards are mainly old cards from some early expansions to the paper card game, but they don't change things dramatically. Dual lands are the most significant addition, but some previously overlooked favorites like the Icy Manipulator, Desert, and Clone are welcome additions. The most significant change is the option for a sealed deck tournament. This adds both the thrill of opening a new pack of cards and the challenge of having to make do with limited resources, which will bring some underused cards into the light of day. The AI does an adequate job of narrowing down its cards, but here is where its limitations are most readily apparent. Although MicroProse has done an admirable job programming the computer to use whatever cards are in its hand, it's not terribly clever when it comes to building decks. And despite claims of improved AI logic, it's still not very good at long-term planning and is prone to oddities like self-inflicted mana burn and casting beneficial enhancements on the opponent's creatures.

The new front end, which insists on sitting behind the Windows task bar, isn't as convenient as it was when it featured separate executables for different portions of the game. Due to the new decks, the campaign game in Shandalar will offer a few surprises for its inhabitants, but since old saved games are incompatible with the updated game, players will have to start anew. This is a major tactical error; since campaigns are long-term, ongoing endeavors, there should be much gnashing of teeth at having to abandon old games. The sealed deck tournaments are enjoyable, but if you've been playing Shandalar for a while, it's a toss up as to whether this expansion is worth starting all over again. *-Tom Chick*

★★½☆☆

Spells of the Ancients
MicroProse
www.microprose.com
Requirements: Magic the Gathering
Multiplayer: None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TEEN T AGES 13+

Blue Byte

Cheat Thrills

Why bring console games to the PC?

Over the years, PC owners have been a little smug about the superiority of their machines for certain types of games (3D shooters, strategy games, flight sims, etc.). When the so-called "next-generation" machines focused much of their processing power to producing fast 3D environments, the technical advantage shifted. *Doom* looked downright quaint next to *WipeOut*. However, as 3D accelerators become more common, the advantage is once again shifting to the PC. Unfortunately, the current fashion is to produce titles for both platforms simultaneously.

Will second-generation console conversions like Daytona USA and Last Bronx avoid the trap of not giving enugh to jaded PC gamers?

The rumor that Microsoft is working on an operating system for Sega's next-generation console system means we're going to be seeing even more cross-platform games. Intel's building Pentium II-based PC motherboards for use in arcade machines. What does this mean for the PC gamer? More mediocre titles lacking the depth we've become accustomed to. When you can develop for multiple platforms, you'll often use a single code-base in order to optimize your development time. Therefore, you're seeing development for machines with 2-4 MB of RAM being ported to a PC with 16-32MB to play with. Where's the room for AI, for depth?

Let's take the case of *Daytona USA*. It's a fantastic arcade game, a superb Saturn game, but the PC version lacks most of the options of more PC-centric race games like *Whiplash* and even *Monster Truck Madness*. Where an arcade machine may only have 2-3 tracks, and console owners seem to accept straight ports with few enhancements, PC owners are used to features, features, features (*Whiplash* has more than 20 tracks).

Why do we want *Final Fantasy VII* on a PC when we can already play it on a PlayStation (which costs less than a 3Dfx card)? Will it necessarily be "better" if given the full 3D card/high-resolution graphics treatment? No, it'll be the same game, only with better graphics. It's unlikely they'll add multiplayer, speech recognition, or any other feature that could only be done on a PC. So why bother?

PC gamers also seem to have a higher standard than console owners (evidenced by the raves for something like *Resident Evil*, which has the same basic gameplay as *Alone in the Dark* circa 1993, and may have the worst voice-acting ever committed to CD-ROM). Oddly enough, the PC ports seem to be mostly of interest to people who own the console version (most of the early message traffic on the PC version of *Resident Evil* has been comparing it to the PlayStation version).

What I'd really like to see are clearly defined games appearing on each platform. Keep the arcade games in the arcade, console games on the console and PC games on the PC. Don't produce three identical versions of the same game just because you can—use the advantages of each system to give unique gameplay experiences.

One final word to developers. I have a hard drive—I can save a game. If you ever make me type in another damn password code to replay a level, I will shoot you on sight.–*Steve Bauman*

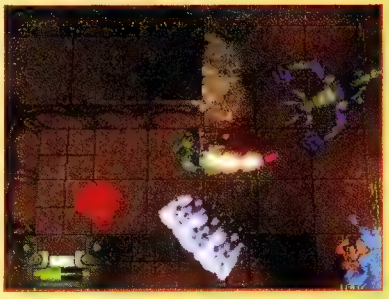
CHEATER

Moto Racer

Enter the following codes as your name (you'll be able to enter your real name)

CDNALSI	Access all tracks
CTEKCOP	Pocket bikes
CESREVER	Reverse all the courses

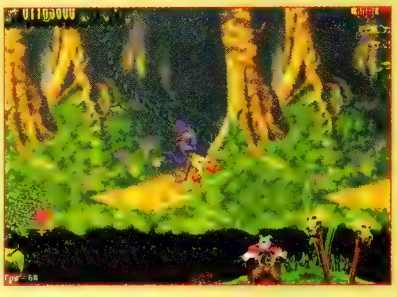
Machine Hunter



Enter the following words in as the password

URANUS	Unlimited continues
SATURN	View end movie
SHOWCREDIT	Shows credits
LAZYPLAYER	All pick-ups
GET SACKED	Fight bosses only
SHOWDROIDS	Old intro movie
NO MISSION	Activates exit areas
GRIMREAPER	One shot kills
2UNLIMITED	Unlimited weapon upgrades
INVINCIBLE	Invincibility

Claw



Enter the codes at any time during play

MPKFA	God mode
MPFPS	Display frame rate
MPPOS	World position
MPPSTOPWATCH	Elapsed time
MPHAUNTED	Ghost bad guys
MPWIMPY	Wimp mode

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Jedi Knight

A beautifully designed sequel

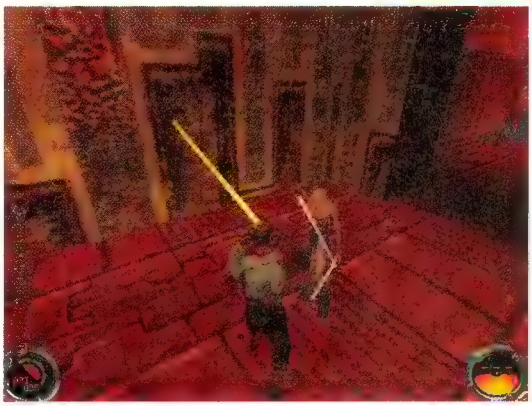
Yes you can save in mid-level. Yes there's multiplayer. Yes there's 3D card support. No, it's not the *Quake* engine. End of review?

Not quite. Right up front, *Jedi Knight* is the best 3D action game this year thus far (we'll see about *Quake 2*, *Half-Life*, *Unreal*, etc.). While it stays a little too close to the conventions of the genre and feels a little bit too much like an improved *Dark Forces* rather than a product with its own unique identity, it's still a beautifully designed game.

Jedi Knight continues the story of the young mercenary Kyle Katarn, who learns that seven Dark Jedi plan to unlock the powers of a secret hidden Jedi burial ground. Along the way, Kyle learns more about the Force, and will have a chance to cross-over to the Light or Dark side based on both his actions during the game (basically, if you shoot innocent civilians, you're evil) and how you distribute the "Force points" that are given at the end of levels (which is often based on the number of secret areas found). You receive different game-endings based on the path you choose.

Oddly, it's the emphasis on narrative that can make single-player *Jedi Knight* a slightly less than satisfying experience. In retrospect, one of the strengths of *Quake* is its lack of narrative—there's nothing to distract you from the visceral thrills. *Jedi Knight* is the polar opposite, telling a clichéd revenge fantasy with full-motion-video cutscenes, rendered sets and actors wearing latex masks trying to act alien. The dialog is typical *Star Wars*; that is, it's full of flat dialog that makes you say, "Did he really say that?" The acting is hammy, particularly Christopher Neame as Jerec (who seems to need an artist to complete his facial tattoo) and Bennett Gilory as Rahn, who's probably doing as well as can be expected of someone with rubber hoses sticking out of his head. Jason Court, who plays Kyle, is merely bland.

However weak the narrative aspects, all is forgiven when you finally fire up a level. You'll be faced with a superb 3D engine, one that is able to render environments that are unimaginable even in *Quake* (which can't handle large open areas without a serious frame-rate hit). It's less monochromatic than id's gothic colossus, and the polygonal characters are well-animated.



[top to bottom]

Expect to run into some familiar objects during the game

Lightsaber battles against the "boss" characters make up entire levels

Kyle faces off against the dreaded "Man in Latex"

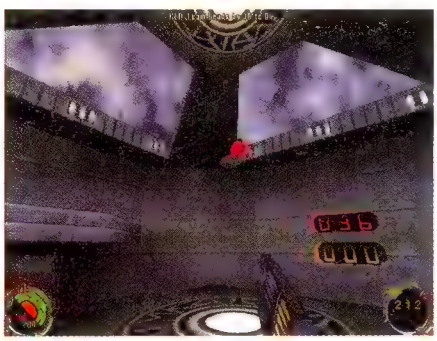
The actual design of each of the levels is what ultimately sets *Jedi Knight* apart from its competitors. The first two levels feature what perhaps is the best representation of a working environment ever—they take place in the bowels of a space station. You'll be running around amidst a series of conveyor belts and what appear to be containers of garbage.

Other levels are less impressive visually, but include other interesting features. Level 15—"The Falling Ship"—takes place on, duh, a ship as it falls to the ground. It's a timed level, the only one you'll encounter during the game, and what makes it so brilliant is that each of the rooms is sideways or twisting. You'll jump on the ceiling and slide down the floor—boxes explode with no warning (OK, they explode when you enter the room), and the only way you'll be able to survive is to follow the arrows to the exit.

Other levels are less effective. While it excels at enormously complex indoor environments, LucasArts' 3D engine looks less at home in the great outdoors. If anything, the canyons and rivers look suspiciously like the ones found in *Dark Forces* or *Outlaws*. While the game touts 21 levels of action, six of them feature a single battle against a Dark Jedi in a small-ish environment. While the battles provide a break from the usual routine, they're somewhat frustrating.

Each level is a marvel of architecture and design, managing to avoid any "gotchas," which also turns out to be their weakest feature. The main problem with the levels is that they're not particularly difficult to complete, from a pure maze/puzzle perspective. If you get stuck, you just need to double-back and find what you've missed (try looking for ledges to jump on). The challenges come solely from trying to survive the attacks of hundreds of stormtroopers and such. While it's true this is standard for almost every 3D shooter, more puzzle-like challenges would provide more variety.

Extra marks to LucasArts for giving the game an impossibly large number of options. In addition to being able to re-map the keyboard and mouse, you can also set



The Capture the Flag levels feature built-in scorekeeping and play-by-play

the way the game handles weapon-switches. Do you want it to automatically switch to the most powerful weapon when you find ammo, or do you want it to avoid so-called "dangerous" weapons (such as the thermal detonators or concussion rifle)? Do you want auto-aiming? How about having the game automatically switch to third-person for lightsaber battles? Ironically enough, LucasArts has probably opened up a can of worms by giving gamers this many options, because they'll only criticize them for failing to include others they never would have otherwise thought about.

Dark Forces was criticized for its lack of multiplayer, and *Jedi Knight* remedies that in a big way. You can create players, choose their on-screen polygonal representation and set their skill level, the latter of which determines the character's force points (you can either be a light or dark Jedi). You can even pick your lightsaber color. In a low-latency environment, you can even watch opposing player's heads to see where they're looking.

Once you've created your character, you can either host or join a game. Hosting a game allows you to limit the skill level of entering players and set the number of people who can join up. You can also determine how many kills a player needs before moving on to a new level, or whether you even want that to be an option.

Jedi Knight has eight unique multiplayer levels, broken down to five deathmatch and three capture-the-flag levels. They run the gamut from enormous to cozy, thereby allowing you to customize your gameplay experience. Some of the levels feature full weapons loads, while others just have Force power, thereby forcing you (no pun intended) to fight as a true Jedi (with lightsabers and nasty spells). Unfortunately you can't control regenerating weapons, or eliminate them altogether, in multiplayer games.

The Capture the Flag levels are particularly well designed, with levels that are color-coded for each side and designs that funnel the action into larger rooms. They have scoreboards to show who's winning, and a voice-over lets you know the status of the game. Too bad no one's ever done a play-by-play announcer for a multiplayer game—imagine a voice-over of "Doofus crams a thermal detonator up Skywalker's…." OK, maybe not.

The game supports 3D accelerators through Direct3D—there are no chipset-specific versions (yet). On a 133MHz Pentium (the recommended minimum) with a 3Dfx card, the game is most comfortable running at 512x384 resolution, showing little-to-no degradation in visual quality over the higher resolutions. On the same machine, the non-accelerated version struggles above 512x384, but loading the lower-resolution textures and running at 320x240 produces acceptable performance, albeit with a significant loss of visual quality.

In the final analysis of *Jedi Knight*, you have to look at a bit of history. The world is a slightly different place than the one the original *Dark Forces* was born into. Then, *Doom* was the hottest game, and *Duke Nukem* was a character in a 2D platform game. When *Dark Forces* was released, it's 3D technology was pretty much equal (its main improvement was the ability to look up and down), but its gameplay was, and is, superior.

With id having released *Quake* over a year ago, the time was right for a new *Dark Forces*. True to form, *Jedi Knight* is to *Quake* what *Dark Forces* was to *Doom*—an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, improvement. Oh, and there's that *Star Wars* thing.

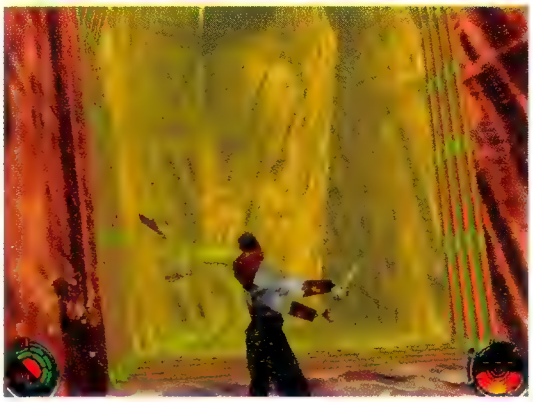
The mythology of *Star Wars* is difficult to overcome. While *Star Trek* has been bastardized by a plethora of inferior projects, LucasArts has kept the *Star Wars* projects to a minimum. However, with the mediocre *Rebel Assault*s, *Yoda Stories* and *Shadows of the Empire* [see page 175], they seem to be trying their best to sully its reputation with gamers. Never fear—*Jedi Knight* has the same high standards for gameplay that LucasArts set with *Dark Forces* and the *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* series.

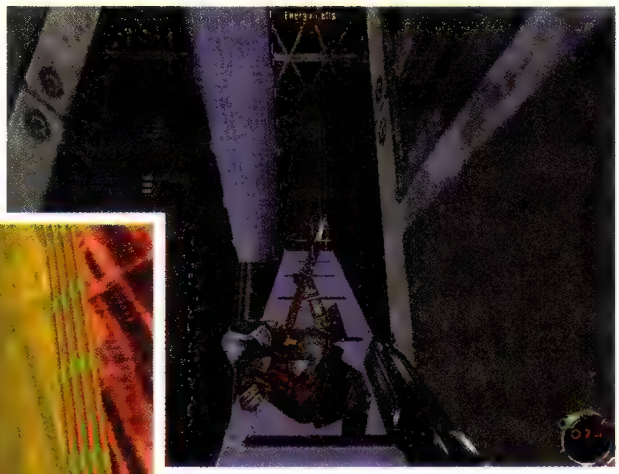
However, if *Jedi Knight* doesn't feel as refreshing as *MDK* or innovative as *Quake*, it's not the game's fault. The twin combination of 3D-game hype with *Star Wars* has caused our expectations of this "*Quake*-killer" to be sky-high, as if we're expecting Harrison Ford to hop out of our monitor, grab us by the shoulder and take us for a ride in the Millennium Falcon. That isn't going to happen, so just play *Jedi Knight* and go along for the ride. Ignore the story and immerse yourself in the incredible environments—you may never want to come back. –*Steve Bauman*

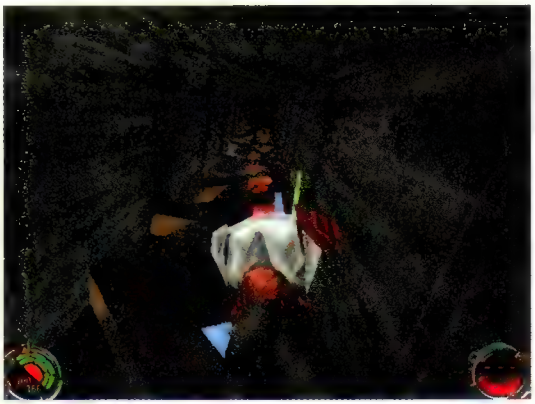
[top to bottom]

All objects follow proper laws of physics by sliding down inclines and falling off edges

You'll have to figure out a way past this force-field







[top to bottom]

Hope you don't get vertigo or experience motion-sickness

Stand around long enough and Kyle starts to fidget

★★★★½

Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II

LucasArts • www.lucasarts.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-32 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial

Hexen II

Incredible 3D fun for the attention-span endowed

[top to bottom]

The mindless but extremely tough Golems are seen throughout the game and explode real nice when dispatched

Blackmarsh used to be a thriving mountain town, but now the shops are dead. Or, at least, they soon will be

Picturesque scenery and bloodthirsty monsters make an excellent combination

Love the game or hate it, Raven's fantasy first person spectacle *Hexen* brought out the best in the *Doom* engine, and in an overcrowded genre managed to create a look and feel all its own. This was due to the emphasis on hand-to-hand weaponry and the addition of complex puzzles and a plot. Now, utilizing a modified version of the original *Quake* engine (think *Quake 1.5*), Raven has struck gold again. *Hexen II* is one of the finest first person action/adventure games on the market.

Admittedly, if you didn't like *Hexen*, or don't like puzzles and exploration, you won't like this game. *Hexen II* is a combination of the action of *Quake* with the atmosphere and intelligence of *Tomb Raider*. And it's a hell of a game. It has great graphics, even in the lower resolutions, but with a 3Dfx card (or other GL capable 3D card) the well-designed levels look spectacular. Their varied color scheme and atmosphere is a far cry from *Quake*'s monotonously somber levels—*Hexen II* moves from gloomy medieval halls to Egyptian pyramids, Roman temples and fiery South American altars. The game has some excellent lighting effects, such as torches that illuminate dark halls. The audio aspect is of equal quality, with downright frightening sound effects and an impressive musical score.

The story? With the demise of the first two Serpent Riders, the third, final and most powerful Rider, Eidolon, is making his bid for power on some hapless fantasy world. Choosing one of four different characters, you must go through five lands to destroy the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, then Eidolon himself. The lands, as with *Hexen*, are essentially one continuous landscape. *Hexen II* doesn't break itself up into a series of self-contained levels, but instead works on a "hub" system. Within each land are areas that you travel which combine to form huge battlegrounds full of monsters to kill, items to discover and tricky puzzles to solve.

The puzzles in the game are generally item orientated, and while they aren't exactly brain surgery, many are very challenging. They often require moving from area to area within each land and paying attention to hints the game gives through messages and journals. There are plenty of action-style puzzles as well, such as properly timed jumps and other platform-style feats. Additionally, there are the RPG-like elements of character stats, experience points and unique abilities and weapons for each character.

While the level design is very impressive, searching around for items or locations can get tiresome at times, a problem made worse by the lack of a map function (this is probably the only first-person shooter where you have to take notes). Other problems in the game are just as noticeable. The AI is not particularly impressive. The monsters of *Hexen II* are far smarter than those found in *Quake*, and some even evade attacks and follow you, but often times they aren't alarmed to your presence until attacked.

There are only four weapons per character, along with a magical tome that alters the weapon temporarily. The weapons are interesting, mixing long-range with hand-to-hand weapons for a different feel in combat than standard shooters.

Since each part of the various hubs is essentially a separate "level," systems with less than 32MB of RAM may find the long load times annoying. The game still uses the "console" for typing many important commands, and while this is a handy feature, things like the mouselook command should be accessible from the options menu. Also, on launch the game automatically attempts to dial-up your network provider, which is annoying if you don't want to play online. Multiplayer options are impressive, with support for up to sixteen players in cooperative mode or deathmatches. Much like *Quake*, it's usually difficult to get a consistently playable game over the Internet.

Flaws and all, *Hexen II* is easily one of the most involving and interesting first person journeys to come around since *Duke Nukem 3D*. It's dark, it's violent and it can be remarkably frustrating almost the whole way through. It's also a beautiful looking, well designed, challenging but never impossible and thoroughly entertaining game. If you like a little brain with your brawn this is the game for you and, we can hope, a good sign to what the future of first-person shooters is going to be. *–Jason D'Aprile*

★★★★☆

Hexen II

Activision • www.activision.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM (24MB for GLHexen), 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-16 players, Internet, LAN, modem

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TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Terracide

More aliens for your chewing pleasure

It's a biological fact: with higher success comes higher expectations. Take Eidos, for example. Their smash hit *Tomb Raider*, featuring the voluptuous Lara Croft, single-handedly gave male gamers a higher "batting average" than Ken Griffey, Jr. and Hugh Hefner combined. Now along comes *Terracide*, trading catacombs and vinyl breast implants for vast tunnel networks, poly-xenology, and not much more.

The premise of the game involves fellow humans from Christmas past who've returned after a long hiatus on the outskirts of the galaxy. Upon learning that *Charlie's Angels* had been canceled during their absence, they immediately riddle the planet with the usual arsenal of destructive weaponry. Naturally, of the several billion folks on Earth, only yours truly and a newly christened space fighter can prevent the impending doom. Your mission requires you to destroy each ship in the invading fleet one by one.

In the same vein as the *Descent* brothers, the game focuses on long, expansive tunnels, occasionally broken up by rooms and caverns. Under the guise of infiltrating the invaders' monstrously large space fleet, players cruise through bright, sterile, metallic corridors in place of the typical dark, dingy tunnels. In an apparent effort *not* to tamper with the fragile psyche of action gamers, the same standard rules of war exist here as in every other 3D shooter: "Blow up the universe. Punch the emblem ending every level. Find out how many secret places you missed. Repeat."

Sporting both speedy frame rates and a convincing head swaying effect during erratic maneuvers, *Terracide* gives an excellent impression of navigating through zero-gravity environments. Though your spaceship sports a schnozz that'd humble Pinocchio, it quickly proves itself as an agile craft for in-close fighting. A full arsenal of weapons and a fairly hefty shield make you a hearty invader against the throngs of humanoids within each hull.

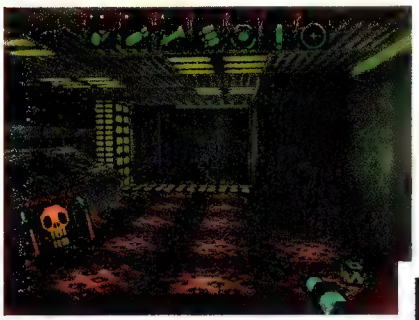
Enemies in the game offer fierce resistance to your presence, though they're not particularly well-endowed between the aural probes [*er, let's not go there. –ed*]. Very quickly, one just nestles into the usual technique of backing up in long corridors and sliding left and right while firing. Still, the sheer numbers of enemies attacking you in almost every corridor keeps the action moving despite the rampant tactical loopholes.

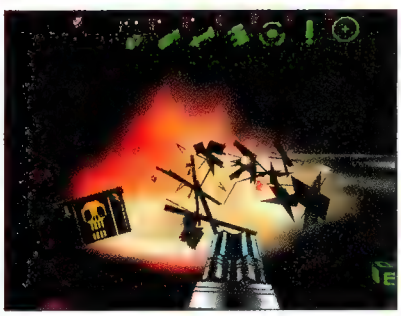
With or without acceleration, the game showcases some of the most eye-popping visuals to date. Even the main menu sparkles with lighting effects and a spinning list of options that'll have stomachs churning from vertigo. Enemy robots and geometric mishaps disguised as the former explode in a glorious display of even more dazzling geometric debris. Tunnel after tunnel (after tunnel, after tunnel) proudly utilize all of the latest fads in technology as if each one were being revealed for the first time. Transparent effects from explosions, illumination of walls from weapon rounds striking nearby, and other dynamic lighting techniques pound the cowering corneas of gamers from start to finish.

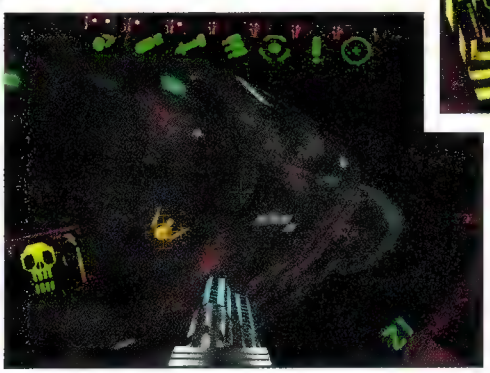
Oddly, the insurmountable problem with *Terracide* just happens to be its strongest point, too. That is, it's less a game than a technology kiosk. While it's easy to appreciate Eidos' enthusiasm for packing the visual goodies in every possible nook and cranny, there's a fine line between slick presentation and old-fashioned showing off. Just because a game *can* show a billion shades of color at the same time and make every room pulse like a rabid disco ball in Tammy Faye's cellar doesn't mean the game *has* to utilize these features relentlessly.

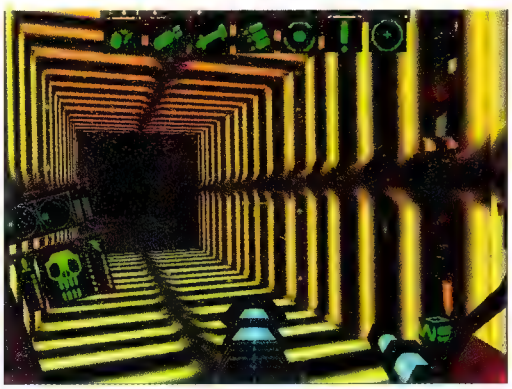
Once past the unbelievable display of special effects, the halls and caverns merely echo with the emptiness of another misguided attempt to hide weak gameplay with pizzazz. The levels are dull, lacking creativity and shedding doubt as to whether the developers ever remembered there was a third axis to work with. An occasional glimpse of imaginative design breaks through (particularly the neat trick of letting players fight outside the ships, navigating to an entry point to the tunnels á la *Hellbender*); overall, though, those snippets of ingenuity don't compensate for the listlessness of *Terracide*.

Owners of *Descent II* who possess an insatiable desire to careen down just one more hallway will enjoy the similarities of *Terracide* to its obvious inspiration. Most folks, however, will find the game world common, the graphics jarring, and the faint odor of *déjà vu* permeating every blinding tunnel they've seen so many times before. *–Tim Royal*









[counterclockwise from left]
Blowing up these computer banks will destroy the ship. Ambush imminent

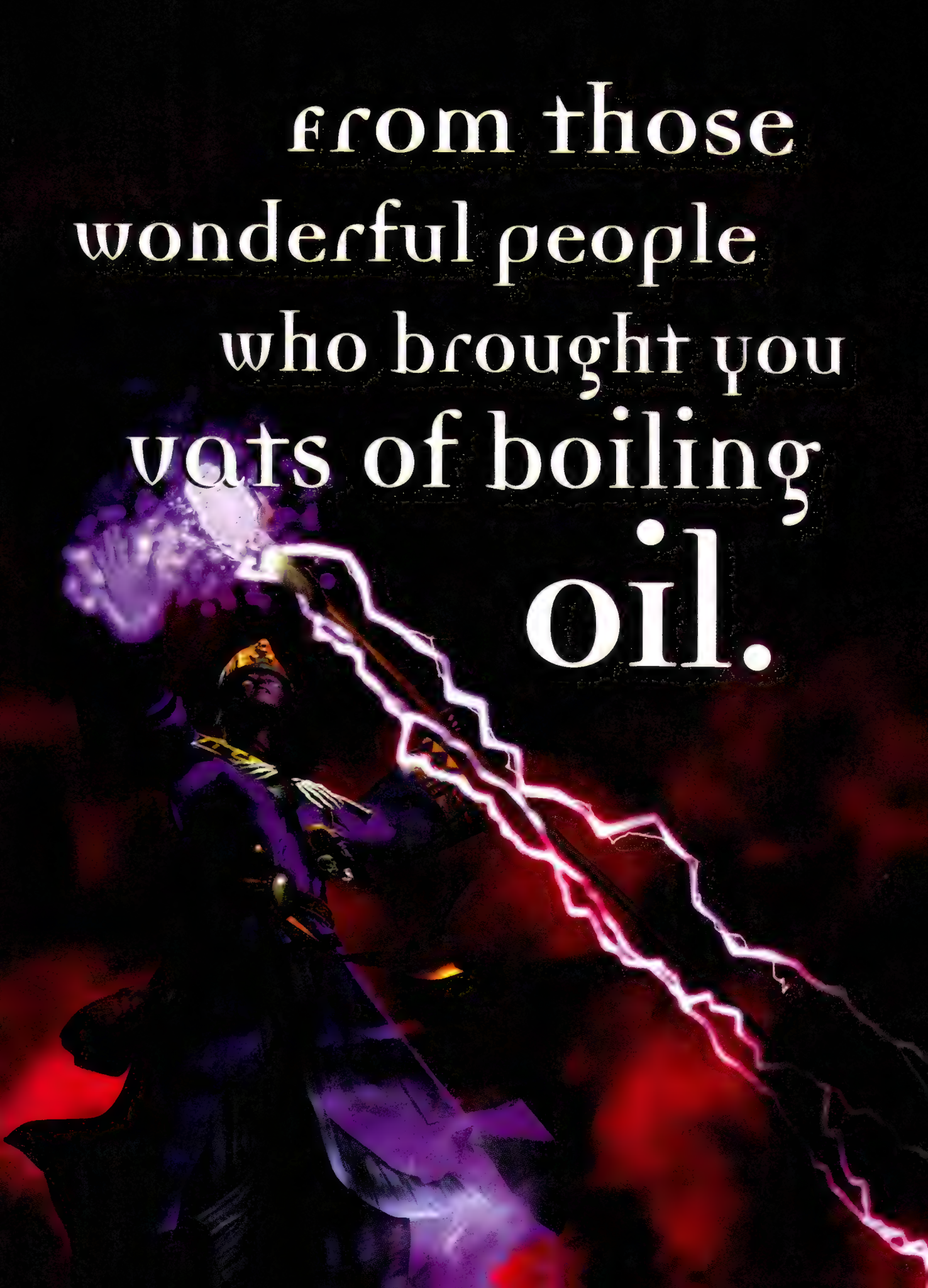
Astounding visuals (including the destruction of this ship) are everywhere in Terracide

The "novelty" in the game, and a good one at that, is the outside combat sequences

Spiraling corridors designed to make any dinner a twice-consumed affair

★★½☆☆

Terracide
Eidos Interactive • www.eidos.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial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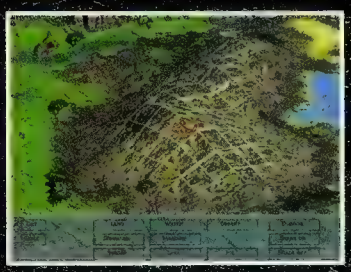


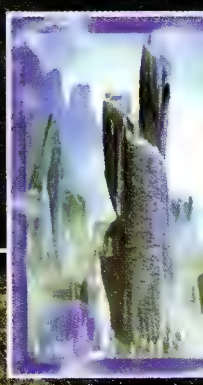
3-D terrain editor

Building on the dramatic features that made Lords of the Realm II a breakthrough in strategy gaming, Lords of Magic combines turn-based exploration and resource management with real-time combat. Join forces with others (up to six players can compete on a LAN or over the Internet) or marshal your forces to take on Balkoth and his Barbarian allies alone. You'll command up to Eighty creatures, including elves, vampires, skeletons, and gargoyles, as you defeat evil and save the realm. Wielding the forces of magic through spells and artifacts of power, you can take multiple paths to victory: more choices, more outcomes, and unlimited replayability.

Lords of Magic features a true 3-D game map, with 16 bit SVGA Graphics and a powerful map editor that puts you in control of terrain height, topography, and texture.

As you explore the land of urak, you'll battle in dark and mysterious caves, castles and dungeons

comes a my



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Impressions

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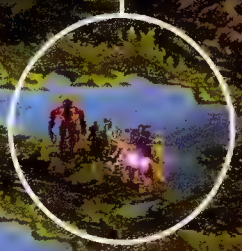
in your library wizards will research spells to overpower your enemies

cal world of swords and sorcery

deep inside your wizard tower sorcerers practice their secret arts to conjure magical creatures and train new acolytes

when you confront the enemy forces of malkoth, "zoom in" to real time combat



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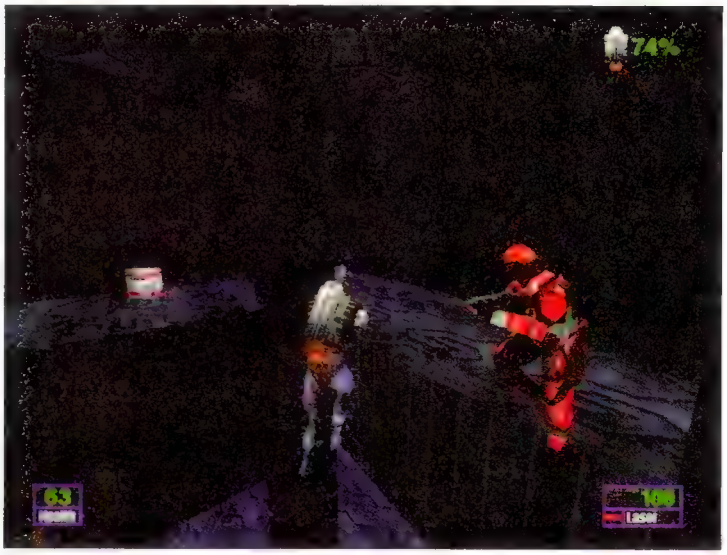
Shadows of the Empire

The frustrating side of The Force



"Hey, aren't you in the wrong game?" Dash meets a Silencer-wannabe

LucasArts seems to make two kinds of Star Wars games. There are the storied classics, such as *TIE Fighter* and *Dark Forces*, and then there are the instant duds, such as *Yoda Stories* and *Rebel Assault II*. You can file *Shadows of the Empire* under the latter category.

Compared to the Nintendo 64 version released last year, the PC-port of *Shadows of the Empire* features better graphics and sound along with 3D-rendered cutscenes. Apart from that, the new version sports the same, mind-numbingly repetitive gameplay that plagued the console game.

Played from either a first or third person perspective, the 10 levels of the game will have you doing everything from flying snowspeeders to roaming the sewers of Coruscant. On paper, it's a can't-lose concept. In reality, it's a can't-win game.

If your idea of fun is playing the same exact level over and over (and over) again because you can't beat the nearly-impossible-to-defeat level boss to move on, this is your game. Considering that some of the levels can take up to 20-30 minutes to negotiate, the entire thing gets rather tepid fast.

He should have taken Door #2. Dash stumbles into a gaggle of Stormtroopers

Showing its console roots, the PC version lacks a save game feature, which would have helped to alleviate a lot of the frustration. And some randomness could have gone a long way as well. As it is, the game has little replayability.

Shadows of the Empire could have been a great game. The graphics, which require a 3D accelerator, are excellent and considerably better than the Nintendo version, and the production values are high all around. Yet in many ways, this seems like nothing more than a 3D-version of *Rebel Assault*—lots of flash and little substance.–*Jason Ocampo*

★★☆☆☆

Shadows of the Empire
LucasArts • www.lucasarts.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 3D accelerator • Multiplayer: none

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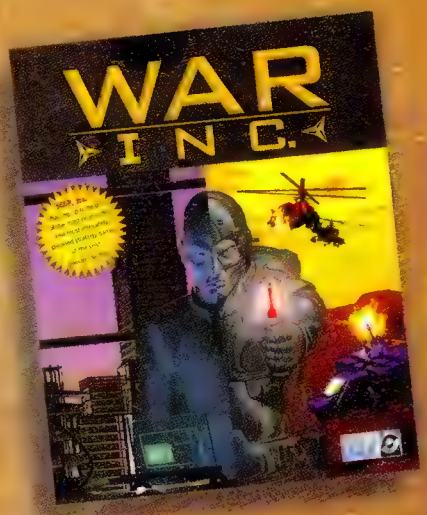

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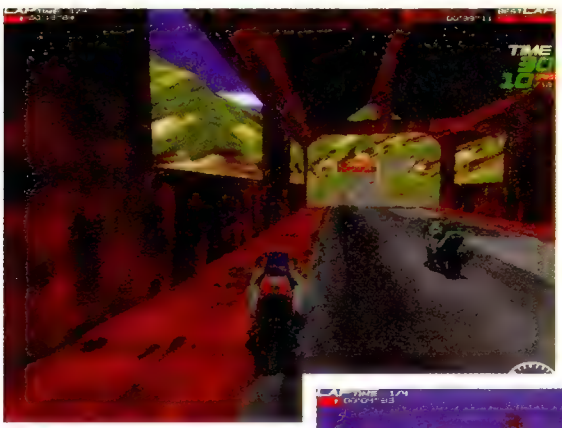
Moto Racer

The best racing game Sega's never released

The obvious inspiration for *Moto Racer* is Sega's arcade game *Manx TT* (soon to be playing on a PC near you). From the tracks to the planes that seem to fly overhead at the most graphically appealing moments, it has everything you've come to expect from a modern arcade game.

However, *Moto Racer* looks considerably better than any arcade game, *Manx* included, thanks to its support for 3D accelerator cards (via Direct 3D). Unfortunately, it shares with its arcade cousins a decided lack of depth, with only eight tracks to race on (more when they get reversed) and arcade physics. The main strategy is looking at the track and figuring out whether you need a bike that accelerates quickly, has a lot of grip or has a higher top-speed (does anyone care how well the brakes work?). The street tracks, in particular, are a bit dull, if visually arresting, due to the non-existent bike modeling.

Here's the extent of the game's strategy



Both in motion and in still shots, this is one attractive game

However, all is forgiven on the snow and dirt tracks. Here you get a thoroughly entertaining tail-out physics model that feels "right," no matter how "wrong" it may be. If you're ever looking to induce vomiting, try switching to first-person mode and racing on one of the dirt tracks. Go up, and down. Up, and down. Up, and down....

Playing *Moto Racer* on a machine with a 3D accelerator card is the only way to go, though on even the most powerful system running the fastest 3D card there's still a fairly sizable draw-in problem. However, a 133MHz Pentium with a 3Dfx card is able to run the game with maximum details at a consistently high frame rate, so what's to complain about?

Overall, *Moto Racer* is another of those "must-have" games for 3D card owners. It's pretty shallow, but eminently entertaining. *–Steve Bauman*

★★★½☆

Moto Racer

Electronic Arts • www.ea.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem

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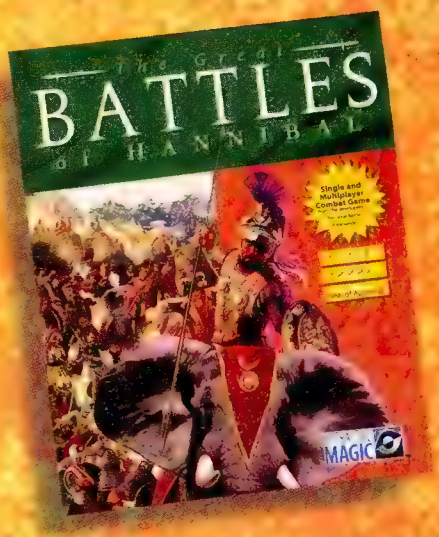

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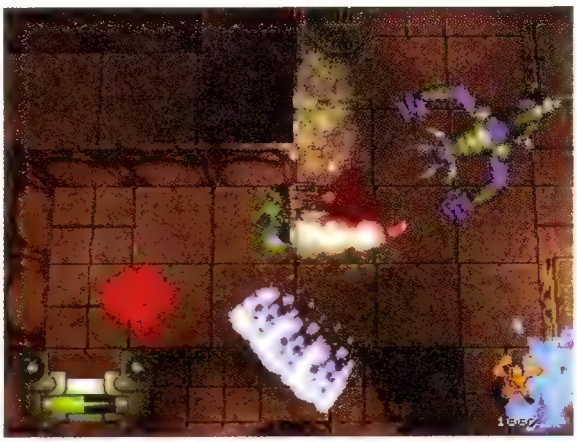
Machine Hunter

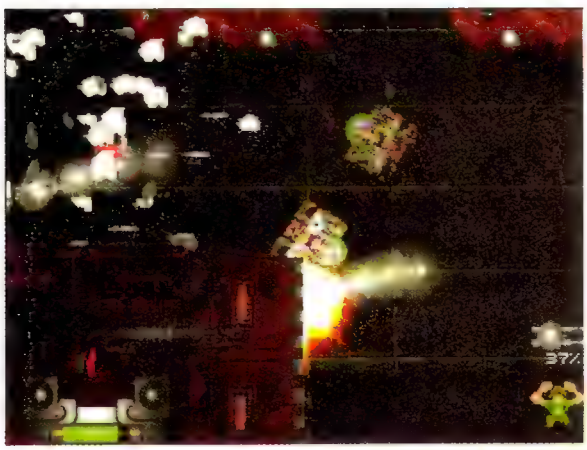
It's Loaded and ready for action

It's the year 2084 and your mission is to fly on over to Mars, take out a series of death robots, invade their bodies, and use their powers to take out the rest of the baddies. *Machine Hunter*'s big "innovation" is the "invade their bodies" part—you can take over the machines that you destroy.

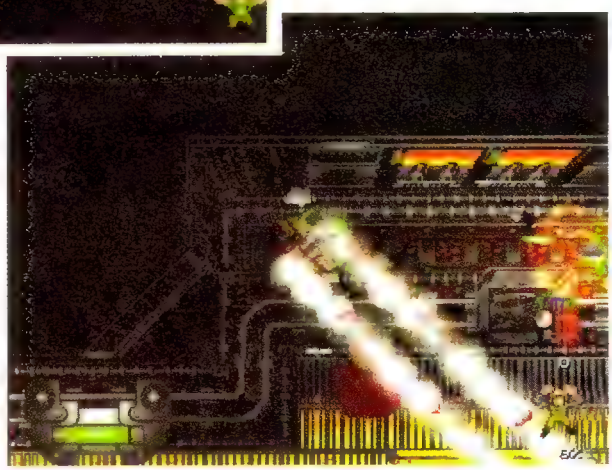
There are 16 levels of action, all with the usual complement of power-ups, hidden areas, etc. The graphics are decent, there's lots of pointless lighting effects and the sound effects are well done (in particular the "squish" sound when you shoot another human). It's all good bloody fun for a couple of hours. There are plenty of multiplayer options (not tested), and the game will support three players with one CD-ROM.



Not the giant lizard-like thing! Oh god, not the giant lizard...



Expect the usual assortment of superfluous lighting effects



The controls are somewhat problematic. It uses a *Robotron*-style "move in one direction, fire in another" interface, but the keyboard cannot be re-mapped (it uses the arrow keys for movement and the keypad for aiming, which gets mighty crowded). It supports a gamepad, but again you can't change the button layout and it's keyed for the layout of a Gravis four-button pad (if you have six buttons, you'll have to re-map your brain).

Aside from the control issues, there is nothing terribly wrong with the execution of *Machine Hunter*. If you can get over the low-resolution graphics you'll find a decent overhead-view, pointless action game. However, it all seems a bit too familiar, as it's basically a version of the PlayStation game *Loaded* minus the psychopaths (and *Loaded* was basically *Gauntlet*). It's artistically bankrupt and so derivative of other titles it has no real identity, just like all of the characters in the game. *–Steve Bauman*

★★½☆☆

Machine Hunter

MGM-Interactive • www.machinehunter.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 60MHz Pentium or higher, 8MB of RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial

Road to Nowhere

Hello MUD-er, hello Homer

```
  Jools enters the game
  Ludmilla> Huggs, Jools!!!!!
<g>
  A sinister avocado takes a
swipe at Fartbreath and misses!
  Ratboy> Hi Jools! Where've ya
been?
  <Fartbreath hops from one
foot to the other, winking
seductively at Jools>
  Kewldude> How old r u?
  Ratboy slices a sinister avo-
cado, causing 231 points dam-
age!
  Klunkerhead> Hey, Jools! Join
in!
  Jools> Hi all. How's it
hangin' Klunk? <elg>
  Kewldude> How old r u?
  <Jools hops from one foot to
the other, winking seductively
at Fartbreath>
  Ludmilla slices a sinister
avocado, causing 100 points
damage!
  A sinister avocado lunges at
Ratboy, causing 53 points of
damage!
  Ratboy> Ouch!
  Ludmilla casts Heal on Ratboy
  Jools dices a sinister avoca-
do, causing 100 points damage!
  Ratboy> Thanks Lud, my little
pumpkinhead!!!! <g>
  <Ludmilla bows graciously>
  Kewldude> How old r u?
  Klunkerhead crushes a sinister
avocado, causing 250 points
damage!
  Jools> Has anyone seen Anne
of Cleavage?
  Ratboy> Not since last
Tuesday.
  Ludmilla> Think she's having
cat problems...
  Kewldude>
HUH?HUH?HUH?HUH?HUH?HUH?
  A sinister guacamole senses
its defeat and slinks away into
the darkness.
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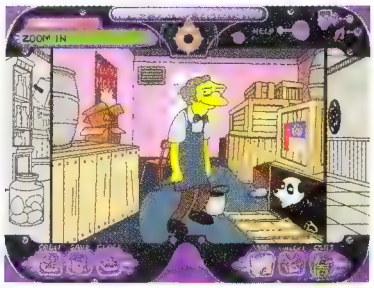

[top to bottom]

Moe smuggles pandas in the back room

Illusia – as graphical as this looks, it's still a MUD at heart

And so on...as fast as their little fingers can type. A chat room with a nemesis. Surely you've been there. This is a *very* primitive example of a MUD style game. MUDs have been around for a long time – certainly before anyone had even conceived of the possibility of the sophisticated graphical RPGs we see today. And surprisingly enough, there are folks who continue to make this style of gaming their drug of choice. I never understood why. But after speaking to quite a few devoted MUD-ers, I notice that three reasons predominate.

First and foremost, and agreed upon by all with whom I spoke, the social interaction is worth almost more than the game itself. Playing with other people in an environment where personal expression is so important far surpasses single player gaming, or even multiplayer gaming where your persona is dictated by the setting. They way they describe it, it sounds a lot like what they would say if someone asked them why they belong to a church group – the sense of community, of belonging, of family, of service to others less fortunate. (Of course, in a MUD, "alms" often materialize as "arms," but in some parts of the world that's true in real life as well...). They have friends there. It's something they can count on. Ann of Cleavage's cat problems are just as important as the ogre (or avocado) around the corner.

Next we see something analogous to the book/film comparison often offered by avid readers. Nothing technology can provide will *ever* be more vivid than that which is created by your imagination. Never. The demons of our dreams are way scarier than the ugliest rendered tentacled creatures on screen.

Finally, most MUDs are free. For merely the price of your ISP, you can escape from life for a hundred hours a week at no additional costs (other than those incurred by treating cardiovascular problems, or hiring divorce lawyers). An up-and-coming graphical MUD-style game, *Illusia* by Living Mask Productions, will attempt to charge for the privilege of playing there. President Michael Browning is confident that this world has enough to offer to make paying players happy. Perhaps this is true, even though *Ultima Online* is having enough problems doing the same, at least initially. Visit *Illusia* as www.illusia.com.

Mmmmmmmm....lard

Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, Maggie, Apu, Krusty, Mr. Burns, Ned Flanders, etc., are all romping across the small screen in Fox Interactive's *Virtual Springfield*. More a toy than a game, this title invites you to explore the city of Springfield (the alleged birthplace of the glove compartment) and observe its denizens as they muddle through daily life.

Lovers of *The Simpsons* will find a lot that's humorous here. From the "I survived Timmy O'Toole being trapped in a well" T-shirt in Homer's bedroom, to Lisa's library, where Jane Austin's *Sense and Sensibility* sits next to a copy of *Scratch 'n' Sniff Senate*, *Simpsons* fans will find themselves often chuckling out loud. Ned Flanders' living room fairly *reeks* of irreverence, with all TV channels blocked out except the Messiah Watch Network; and the kids' toy collection containing such favorites as the battling Stone-em Atone-em Bible-bots, and the Last Supper Action Set, complete with chalice.

A few lifeless arcade games and a trading card hunt contribute to the "game" part of the product, and the interactive scenarios are limited and few considering the potential of the license. You'll laugh hard, but find yourself really, really wanting a whole lot more. True *Simpsons* fans should buy it anyway. After all, it comes with an AOL disc. –*Cindy Yans*

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Boots of Re

Unca Solves the Final Antara Chapters

This month we finish the *Betrayal in Antara* walkthrough and solve a particularly puzzling sequence in *The Space Bar*. Business has been brisk in The Boots of Re, and the boys (Bashed, Battered and Bewildered) had to stop a particularly vicious brawl when a rowdy group of fans of the strategy game, *X-COM Apocalypse*, started chanting "We're number one!"

Hot & Not

Betrayal in Antara was still the most popular role-playing adventure during September. *Twinsen's Odyssey* again garnered the most adventure game votes.

Betrayal in Antara

The main objective in Chapter Seven is for the two parties to join together. From Kaelyn's father's house Kaelyn and Raal must go northwest through Ridgewood to Grandeur where a Tr'Kaa messenger gives them a note from William and Aren instructing them to go to Darvi. At the Reliable Couriers they'll be directed to the Feral Duck Inn. The innkeeper, for 30 (and then 45 more) burlas will hand them a note asking them to go to Antara.

Along the way is an optional but rewarding adventure involving senwater and a shovel. Speak with Jhana at the Temple of Henne in Durst, get blessed, and go rescue Phoebe. Use the shovel and a single senwater at the base of the tree. Go back to Jhana to have all the party's skills increased by three points, and to receive some other benefits.

The bridge west of Durst is down so go west to the fork in the road, then north and follow the road through Camille and Eastbank. At the next major fork go west to Burlen and then south to Everton. Go west and south to meet William and Aren. Clear the mercenaries out of the pass to Korus Landing by combining three pieces of rope and flasks of oil into incendiary bombs. Use the bombs on each group of mercenaries (do not initiate combat). Go to Antara. Raal leaves the party near the city gates, click on William or Aren to join the parties. Click on the gates to end the chapter.

Who killed Gregor? Solving this mystery is the primary objective of Chapter Eight. Go to the Mortar and Pestle Shop in Breland for fidali leaves. Go southeast to Knightridge and talk to the barkeep at the Sword and Crook to learn about a local artist. Knock on doors to find him. He'll refer the party to a farmer next door. Talk to the farmer for a clue to the mystery. Go south to the shipyard in Nathby and look hard for Captain Tyee (he's difficult to find).

Buy ale and fatty meat at the Lusty Maiden Bar. Poul, standing at the bar, will refer the party to Misha in Beluckre for ale. Misha is in a large building without a sign. She'll exchange the key to Gregor's room in Havesly for sencream. Give Marlon at Marlon's Mercantile senwater, fidali leaves and fatty meat. He'll give the party sencream.

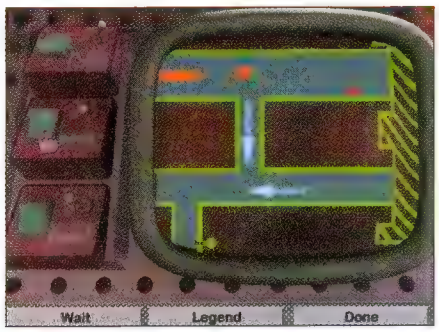
Go to Lord Sheffield's castle in Havesly and talk to Sheffield at the entrance. Go to the Sentinel Inn and give Gregor's key to the innkeeper to get access to Gregor's journal. Read the journal and speak with the banker in the bank and then with the man in the house nearest the lighthouse (northeast of town). Go to the lighthouse and click on the rocks at its base to find two incriminating notes. Go back to Sheffield's castle to end the chapter.

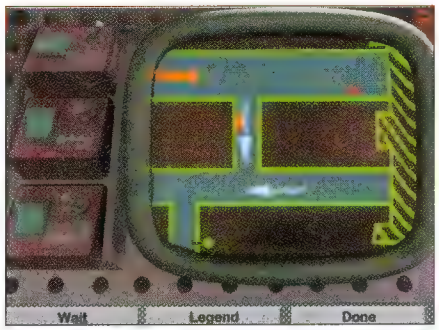
The primary objective of the ninth and final chapter is to reclaim the souls of the consort and princess. The chapter begins in Sheffield castle. Go to the northwest corner of the main floor to take the stairway up to Selana's room on the second floor. Get the cellar key from the chest (and a piece of paper) and go downstairs to the gate in the northeast corner and use the cellar key.

In the caves, read the note on Petrov's body. Return to the castle and exit. Northwest of the castle is the entrance to Bryce's caves. Enter and go to the old lair to read notes inside a chest. Go north to the Waste. After winning the battle with Bryce's hounds and Bryce go north to the Workroom and talk with Bryce. Open the chest and take a single unit of senwater, nudberries, Tr'Kaa feather, talicor powder and hardening fluid. Drop them into the cauldron to end the chapter and the game.

–Andy Backer

To solve THE SPACE BAR'S control panel puzzle:





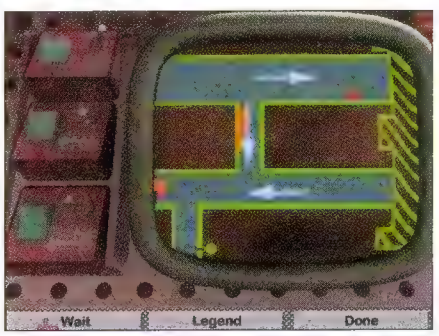
[left to right, top row] Turn the top left switch off, the middle left and lower left switches on, flip the middle right switch down, the lower right switch left, and press the Wait button

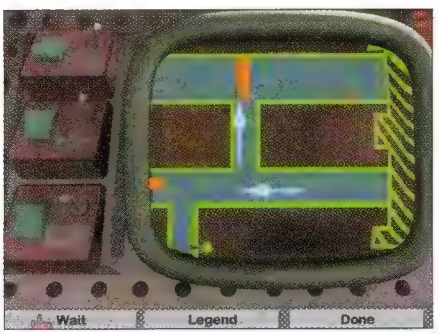
Flip the top left switch on and press the Wait button twice

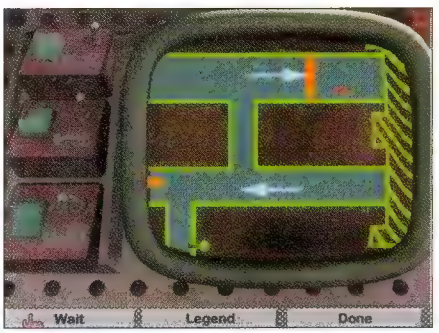
[left to right, bottom row] Turn off the top left switch and flip the middle right switch up and press Wait

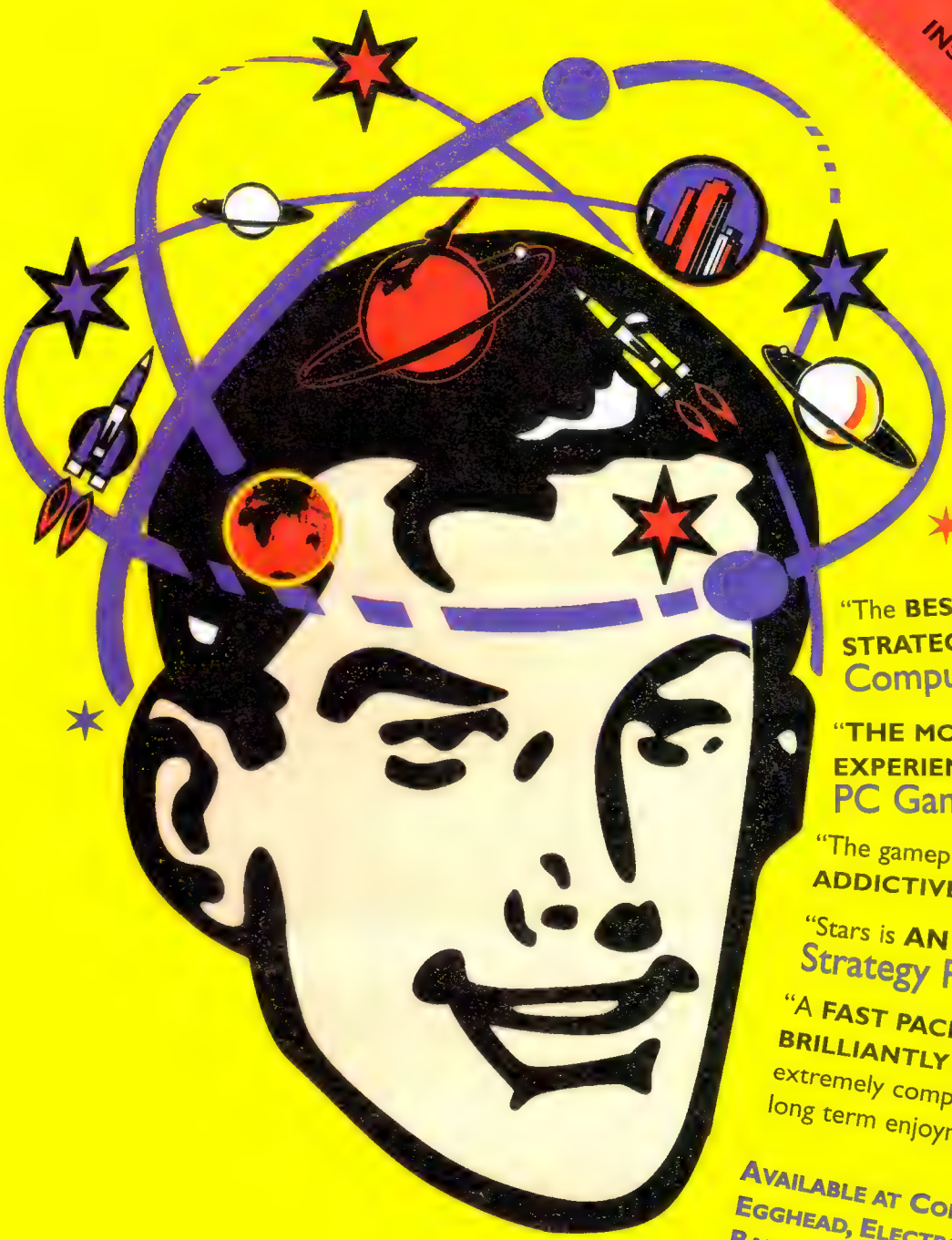
Turn the top left switch on, turn the middle left switch off and press Wait

Flip the lower right switch to the right and press Done









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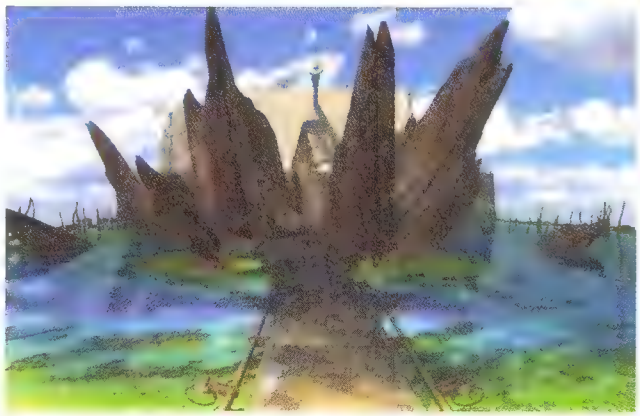
Riven

A beautiful work of art

When something is elevated to the level of a pop-culture phenomenon, it's always the purists who wish to knock it down. There's often been a lack of critical respect afforded to artists that manage to successfully combine craft and commerce. Somehow their works manage to connect with people, and whether or not you "get" their appeal, they cannot be ignored.

Myst, of course, is a pop-culture phenomenon. The best-selling CD-ROM of all time (at over 3.5 million and counting), it's beloved by many and seemingly hated by even more – there's little middle-ground. Its followers are passionate about its world and its mythology; its detractors say it's a screen saver rather than a game, as if there is some sort of concrete definition of that nebulous and fluid term, and they alone know it.

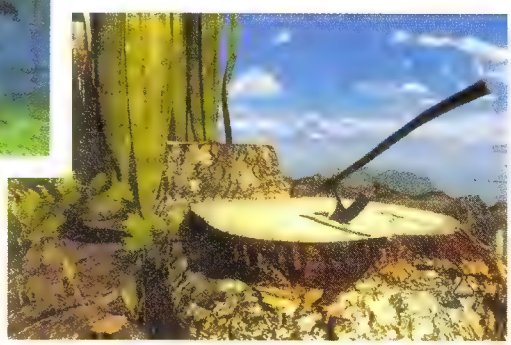


[top to bottom]

You'll occasionally bump into an animal or person in Riven – here's a sunner, er, sunning itself

No, you won't find Superman here

Someone's been cutting down all of the trees... but why?



Looking at *Myst* four years after its release, the truth can be told – it's an excellent adventure game. Had it been produced by LucasArts or Sierra, companies with a long history of both critical and commercial success in the genre, no one would have batted an eyelash over its blockbuster status. However, many non-adventure game fans felt compelled to try the game being covered by the mainstream press and were left slightly less than unimpressed (never mind they probably didn't like the genre to begin with).

Riven, the sequel to *Myst*, is likely to be harshly criticized by those same people, and beloved by all of the people that made *Myst* such a success. Once again it often feels like a screen saver, with static screen after static screen, and an attempt at a Quicktime VR- or *Zork Nemesis*-style 360 degree panning environment is almost laughable. It has the same simplistic interface, lack of inventory and no meaningful interaction with the natives – things that frustrate long-time adventure gamers. However, *Riven* sucks you into its world even more effectively than *Myst* ever did, fleshing it out with more story, better integrated puzzles and a visual splendor that must be experienced to believe.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about *Riven* is what it doesn't do. It doesn't dumb itself down in order to appease to the mainstream audience that bought *Myst* and never got off the first island. It delves deeper into the mythology and back-story of *Myst*, doling out new evidence about the D'ni, the ancient civilization that gives *Riven* its flavor. To give away too much of the plot would ruin the game, so skip ahead if you're at all concerned about reading a few plot points. *Riven*, like *Myst*, puts you in a world without giving you much of a push in any particular direction.

The D'ni possess the ability to travel between realms by writing books that describe these worlds. These books serve as links to the worlds. Unfortunately, these skills tend to imbue certain D'ni natives with the feeling that they're god of the realms. One such deluded novelist is Gehn, the father of Atrus. Atrus created the linking book called Myst, and the game of the same name dealt with the problems of Atrus' sons. *Riven* picks up after that adventure.

It seems Gehn is trapped in the world called Riven (why is for you to discover), as is Atrus' wife Catherine. Atrus needs someone to travel to Riven in order to rescue Catherine and save the inhabitants of the collapsing realm. You're given a one-way trip to Riven, with Atrus' assurance he can get you back when your task is complete.

Upon completing the game, you'll get one of three different endings, all of which are the antithesis to the neat and satisfying endings we've become accustomed to other games spoon-feeding us.

Most of the above information is contained in a journal that Atrus gives to you before your trip and is available as soon as you start the game. Eventually you'll find two other journals on the island which will effectively tell the tale of Riven, and give you more of the histories of the D'ni, Atrus, Catherine and Gehn.

It's somewhat ironic that in this digital medium, *Riven* utilizes the written word, without even a voice-over, to tell its story. Reading the journals littered around Riven helps bring out the game's human element, and when you consider the family conflicts, the sons battling fathers, you realize how *Riven*'s creators are trying to generate their

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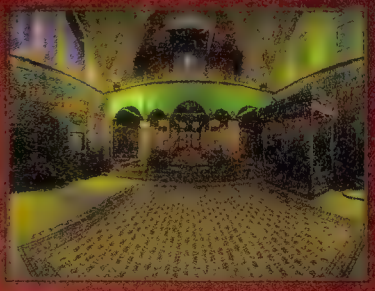

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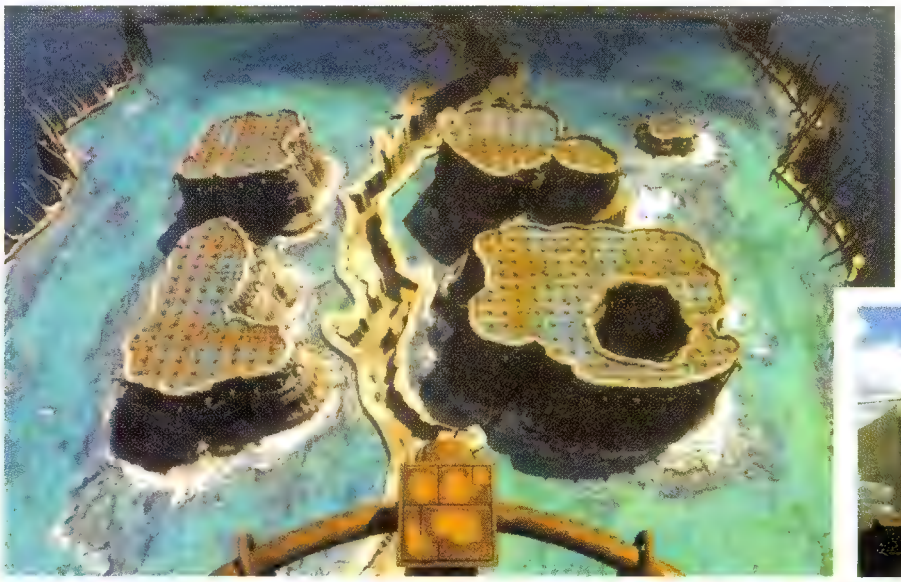

[clockwise from left]

Methinks this is a puzzle...

Moving between islands, you're treated to breathtaking rollercoaster rides

The textures used on the gameworld objects are incredibly life-like

Gehn is conducting some interesting experiments in his office

No, it's not a photograph

own mythology. That they succeed is a testament to their skills as storytellers.

And that is ultimately what *Riven*, and *Myst* before it, is all about. It's about the lost art of storytelling, of the diminishing art of both oral and written communication. It manages to be both pretentious in its goals – you half expect a "Reading is Fundamental" sign to appear somewhere – and unpretentious in the way it presents them to you.

Riven comes on five CD-ROMs and takes place on five different islands, each contained on its own CD, so there's minimal disk swapping. Each island is populated by various machines and devices, and like every game since *Myst*, it's up to you to figure out how to operate them. Most are fairly simple, while others require painstaking note-taking and backtracking to look for clues that are littered throughout the islands.

Until very late in the game, you won't mind the exploration. Though it's not something hardcore gamers care to admit, graphics do matter. When experiencing the world of *Riven*, it's hard not to be in awe of the visuals. Beautifully rendered in 16-bit color, the level of detail is astonishing. It's without question the most organic and realistic virtual world ever realized on the computer. Some of the scenes look like photographs, but up close you realize the trees are like nothing else you've ever seen, and the animals sunning on the rocks don't exist in our world.

However, it's not all about graphics. Using the traditional method of calculating an adventure game's worth, it comes up a bit short. It doesn't take that long to finish (maybe 20 hours) and most of the puzzles are logical and relatively easy (though they're beautifully integrated into the environment and eminently believable). However, you get the feeling the creators of the game were in no particular hurry to finish the game, and you shouldn't be either.

It also doesn't take many chances with the original *Myst* formula, and by playing it safe, it occasionally feels like a re-make rather than an all-new game. In so many respects, *Riven*, like *Myst*, isn't as revolutionary a product as the original *Zorks* or *King's Quest* were. However, digging below the surface, you can find something truly revolutionary about both games. They don't fit in the mold of what a computer game's supposed to be. If a developer wants backing for a project, there'd better be more action and explosions than character development or a point. The battle between good and evil, which is pretty much the plot of every game in existence, has become an excuse for a lot of sound and fury. With those limitations, what's the gamer to latch on to?

This is why *Riven* feels so fresh. You latch on to all of the subtle details Robyn and Rand Miller and Richard Vander Wende have created for you. Turn off the lights, crank up the speakers and immerse yourself in this beautiful work of art. –*Steve Bauman*

★★★★½

Riven: The Sequel to Myst

Red Orb Entertainment • www.redorb.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 100MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM; MacOS, System 7.5 or higher, 90MHz PowerPC or higher, 9MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: None

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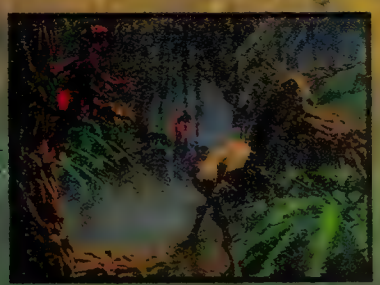

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Dark Earth

Out of darkness dawns a light

Games don't get much more absorbing than *Dark Earth*. This action/adventure plays like a Swiss clock, is a visual feast and has a suspenseful story line. Its chilling introduction includes numerous nuclear bombs devastating the world's cities. Dark clouds of dust cover the earth. Only a few fortunates escape to a mountaintop where the sun still shines. There, these survivors erect a temple to the sun in gratitude.

Years later, this sun-worshipping society produces Arkhan, our sword-wielding hero. He becomes contaminated with a disease they call "the black rot." It slowly turns him into a beast with razor-sharp claws (similar to *Marvel Comics*' Wolverine, but with more hair). His former friends, who are now afraid of him, shun him and his enemies try to kill him. He is forced to sneak around in the dark corners of the city to find a cure. In his search he uncovers prejudice, deceit, corruption and conspiracy—in the light he finds darkness and only in the dark does he find comprehension.

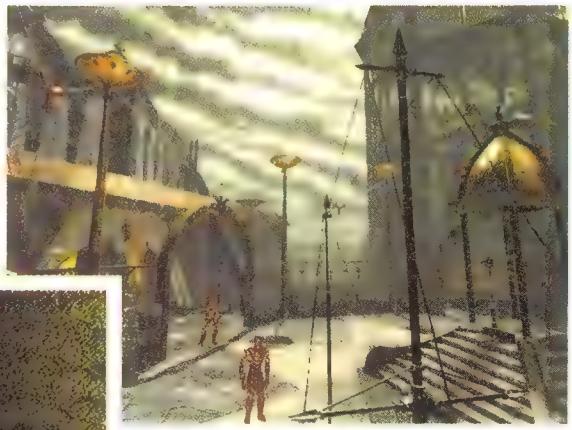
[clockwise from right]

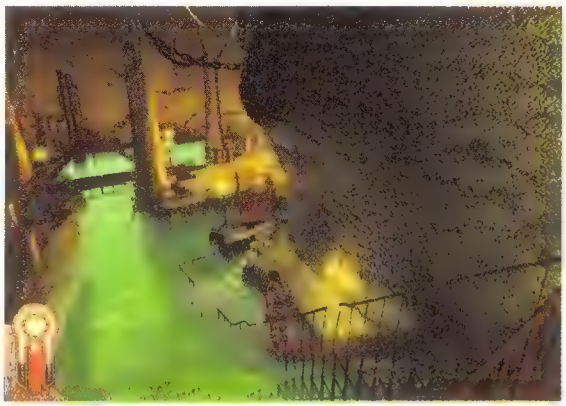
The settings are all as picturesque as this one, but notice the pixilated characters

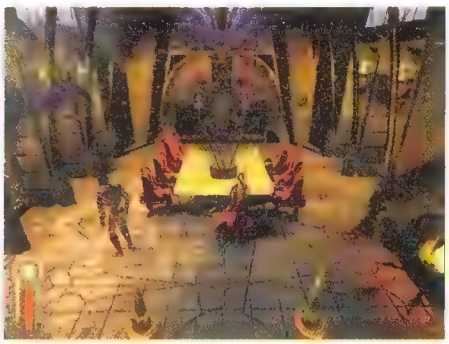
Arkhan checks out the Council Chamber

Delia, a dancer in the lower city, provides some cheesecake

Arkhan's search takes him underground, even underwater







The player is under a time constraint. Arkhan becomes a monster, but is still somewhat recognizable early on. But, as Arkhan's disease progresses he visually becomes more and more bestial, his voice changing from baritone to bass to how-low-can-you-go. Eventually, he loses his powers of speech entirely. The player experiences Arkhan's frustration and the pain of his transformation. They serve to help the player identify with Arkhan and even accept his animal rage when he is forced to kill. Arkhan's dilemma makes the game extremely compelling to play, but so do the game's numerous settings and characters.

As in most traditional adventures, Arkhan must interview all those he meets and search every room for objects to help him in his quest. There are a number of combat situations, however, which also makes the game an action game, although a fairly easy one. There is even an easy mode setting for the completely arcade impaired and there is also a special attack mode, which allows Arkhan to kill with one blow. It should be reserved for emergencies though, because Arkhan becomes more diseased each time he uses it.

The graphics are for the most part stunning. The settings are always startlingly innovative and realistic. The remnants of the pre-war world have been gathered and stored in various rooms. Enterprising mechanics have even been able to get some of the old machines up and running. The settings are reminiscent of those in the movie *Waterworld*.

The point of view camera constantly changes as players take Arkhan for a stroll or whenever he's engaged in combat. Not only are all the views cinematic but they also help immerse players into the three dimensional world of the game. Players feel like they are really there, more so than in most other adventure games.

The two CDs come with two versions of the game, one hi-color and the other regular 256 color Super VGA. The hi-color version adds some shading not seen in the SVGA version, but otherwise there is little difference. In both, the characters are pixilated when viewed from a distance, but up-close they are not. They are, for the most part, animated realistically but occasionally twitch their arms like marionettes hanging from strings.

Each setting is a separate module and players must wait while the next module is loading. The length of time depends on the computer's CPU speed and how much of the game players load onto their hard disks. The transitions are handled in typical movie fashion, fading to black.

The interface seems to have been designed primarily for a console rather than a PC because it seldom uses a mouse (although at present the PC is the only platform on which the game is available). Players must maneuver Arkhan with the keyboard. Games can also only be saved at key locations where there is a Sun God symbol. Arkhan must be maneuvered to stand in front of it and pray before the Save Game screen pops up.

Overall, *Dark Earth* is a splendid adventure game. It may not have enough arcade action for some gamers, but adventure gamers definitely should experience it. It's not puzzle-intensive, but is complicated enough to keep even the most experienced adventurer glued to the screen. *–Andy Backer*

★★★★☆

Dark Earth

MicroProse • www.microprose.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 75 Mhz Pentium or higher, 8MB of RAM (16MB for hi-color), 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: None

Lop off heads, sever limbs and bring your enemy to his knees (literally).
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Legacy of Kain

Kain's World! Kain's World! Party time! Excellent!

The kids scream. The dog growls. The coffee pot blows up during the latter stages of percolation, and the radio is set to country tunes. Sure, you can brood over the melancholy flavor of your so-called life. Or, you can play *Legacy of Kain* from Activision, and be swept away into the bittersweet saga of Kain's twisted revenge.

The game takes place in Nasgoth, beginning with your death. That's right, your death. Playing Kain, a self-proclaimed "man of noble blood," you'll start your journey being booted from a tavern before nightfall. Immediately pounced upon by local hoodlums, you soon succumb to the flurry of their slashing blades.

Enraged by the treachery that led to your demise, you form a pact with Mortanius, who grants you an alternate existence as a vampire for the purpose of seeking vengeance. It soon becomes clear that while exacting revenge *was* one of the stipulations in the contract, Kain should have read the fine print more closely (particularly the part about eternal damnation and the modified dinner menu).

Right from the beginning, *Legacy of Kain* invokes a sense of utter hopelessness and dismay. Thanks to effects such as the pale flicker of torches inside caves, and the grim transition from daylight to nighttime darkness, the entire world feels dreary. No one seems at peace, as if they all remembered leaving the porch light on *en route* to work that morning.

The rudimentary environment and controls (as expected, being a direct PlayStation port) keep the focus far, far away from character development. In its place is a deep, foreboding tale. The way the game mirrors *Diablo*'s simplicity will not appease hard core role-players. On the other hand, stripping away complexity grants players the freedom to become absorbed in Kain's world, rather than to toggle the stats screen after every kill.

One might expect that the "Look, but don't touch" world equates to boring, lackluster travel. Wrong. Every alley, dark corner, and winding road hides scores of foes ready to cane Kain. Ranging from comatose to ferocious, these denizens make traveling throughout Nosgoth quite treacherous. Combat centers around two simple actions, slashing and sucking. Joke if you will (I did), but players will have to bring a certain amount of finesse to their cutlery onslaughts. Slash with unbridled rage, and most likely the victim will crumple into fruit leather—well before you can get a good latch. Hold back, and their blows may strike too quickly to defend. This balance between reckless abandon and fatal timidity sets *Legacy of Kain* apart from any other game of its type.

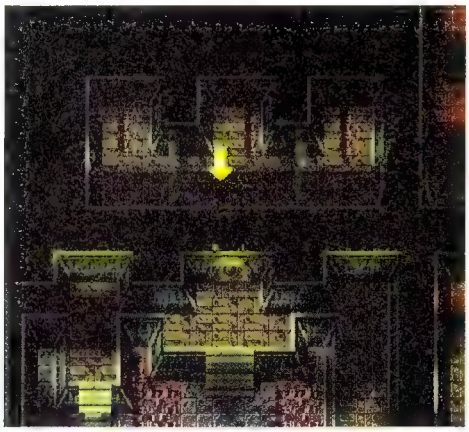
[clockwise from right]

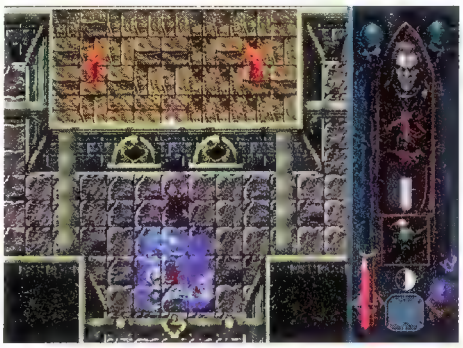
Thousands of eerily lit halls await you on your journey

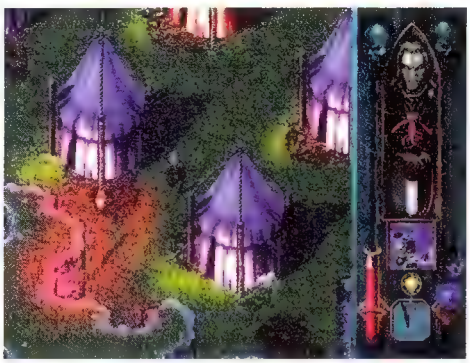
How bazaar, how bazaar

What metal lollipop can withstand the might of a vampire's sword?

The fire sisters, disguised as the Marx brothers, send potent spells towards Kain







Kain's sullen narration at critical points in the game coaxes gamers forward through the unfolding story. Clues aren't as obvious as "find the Pillsbury leper colony by following the trail of bread crumbs." Used instead are creative suggestions subtle enough to make gamers exercise their minds. In perfect balance, you'll never feel steered too rigidly, or left without a sense of direction. The game stresses the importance of using your different forms (vampire, werewolf, mist, and orthodontist...er, bat) wisely. Even the time of day plays a tactical role. When possible, attempt combat at night when vampires possess the greatest strength.

This title certainly won't appeal to the squeamish. Many times during the game, survival hinges on procuring the blood of sturdily-chained victims through Advanced Suction Techniques, a college level class that perennially fills up faster than its rival course, Aquatic Necking. Sure, it's technically possible to limit yourself to devouring the steaming red ale of enemies rather than victims. Realistically, however, no matter *who* they are, their juicy presence will tantalize and tease you at your weakest moment until you chug down the contents of their writhing bodies (now you know why the Campbell's soup kids are so chubby... they played this game a lot).

Legacy of Kain disturbs, depresses, and delivers a first rate gaming experience. The high-paced action mixes fluidly with a story that steers players through every twist and turn of its plot. Like an orchestrated symphony, the game gradually crescendos into a titanic clash of epic powers. Winning this horrific, hard fought battle is guaranteed to leave players with a smug sense of accomplishment, and that's the true sign of a great game. It sucks all right, but in a good sort of way. *–Tim Royal*

★★★★☆

Legacy of Kain

Activision • www.activision.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 100MHz Pentium or higher, 6MB of RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: None

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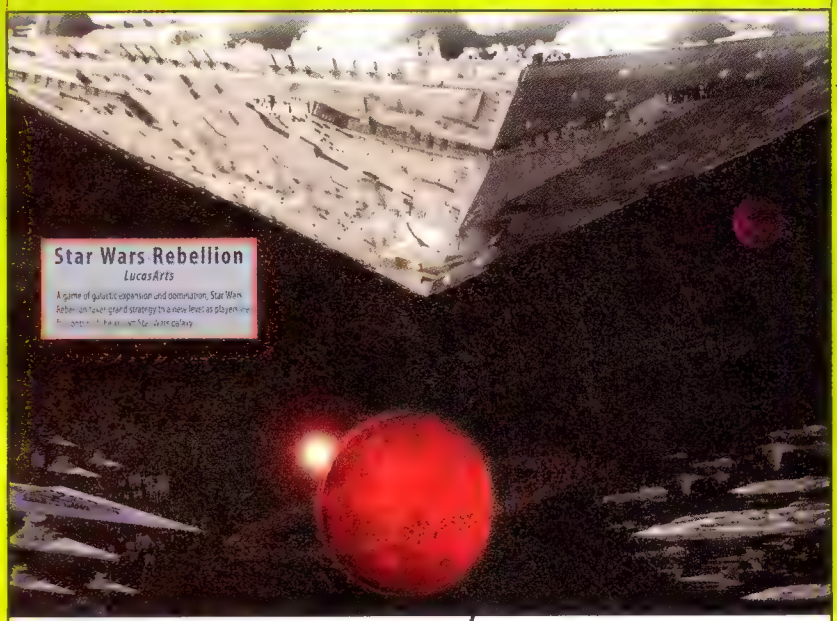
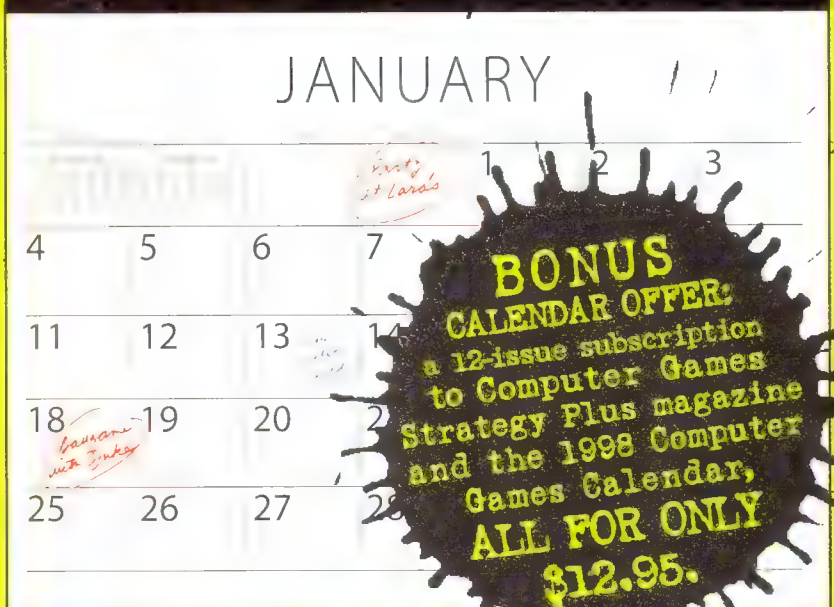


19" deep



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Temüjin

Ghengis Khan awakes

It's not too hard to find some common ground among the various full-motion video adventures released over the years. Basically, they've all sucked. Not just mildly, but emphatically. So when SouthPeak Interactive announced *Temüjin* as an "all-immersive technology," who could blame the skeptics? Problem is, the cynics are wrong. It *is* the best full-motion game ever produced.

The game takes place inside a museum, where you as the player try to gain some recollection of your past. Meanwhile, actors dwelling within the many rooms appear from time to time. Why? To cheer you up? Perish *that* thought. No, they lash out at you, insult you, threaten you, and basically make sure you don't suffer from the trauma of high self-esteem.

What *Temüjin* does well, it does *very*, *very* well. Other than the abominable navigation, everything in the game shows a professional touch and polish. The imagery is excellent, showing unbelievable attention to subtle details. Paintings, sculptures, drawers and tables all have a substance one would never have imagined possible in a full motion video game. Walk to a table and pick up the napkin. Move to the walls of the gallery to gape at the incredible rendering of each painting. Zoom in on the phone, check your messages, and try all manner of foul 976 numbers (Remember to dial '9' for an outside line. Seriously). A good portion of the initial experience (after the shock wears off) will be in exploring this new, exciting, "Yes, you can touch it and it's even free" world.

Searching for clues to reveal your identity will bring you face to face with many puzzles, some easily solvable and others highly complex. It can be a real challenge to get all the components of the various projects done, from making potions to picking the locks of cupboards and desks. SouthPeak calls their puzzles "convoluted," though a more fair assessment would deem them complex problems with multiple-step conclusions. As an example, the scorpion puzzle (which looks simply stunning) requires four distinct steps in order to solve it. How the puzzles integrate seamlessly into the game world deserves mention as well. The smaller puzzles seem to play a part in the bigger puzzles, which in turn opens up more answers about the past. The mystic diary helps piece together clues about the different museum employees. Once their section of the master portfolio is complete, an extensive video clip of that employee's past plays. *Temüjin* does a commendable job of maintaining interest by rewarding gamers with these video interludes at staggered points along the way.

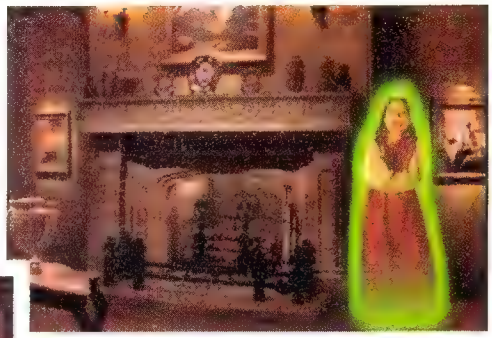
[clockwise from right]

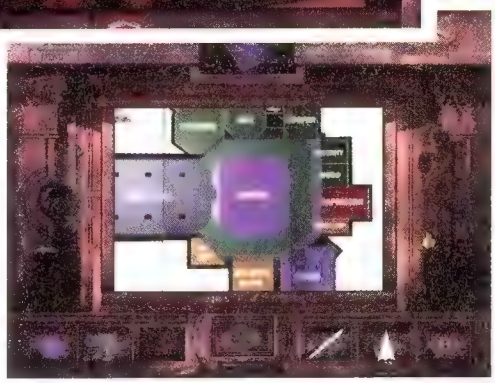
Our friend discovers the joys of radioactive isotopes

"Oops. Sorry. Didn't know this stall was taken...."

Maps are our friends. You'll use this to keep your bearings

Every painting through these halls is described via a poignant narration





Unfortunately, the navigation scheme could use some serious polishing. Lacking a short cut from room to room means spending time meandering through the same halls repeatedly. While the halls certainly deserve a second (or third, or fourth) glance, eventually the necessity for a shortcut becomes painfully apparent. For instance, you'll see a door you want to enter farther down the hall, but it takes a few minutes to actually navigate to the door because the mapped route takes you in several direction changes first. Even more frequent are the times when the point of view comes to rest in an awkward position, requiring manual adjustments to find the hot spot for the next destination. Mouse clicks seem to be ignored while in the auto-travel mode. There's nothing more frustrating than passing a room you *meant* to go into, knowing it'll take several mouse clicks and naughty under-your-breath mutterings to get back "where you wanted to go today."

Perhaps the greatest tragedy comes from the fact that this singular blemish indelibly mars an almost perfect game. As if to taunt you, there are museum maps in the gift shop that could have been linked to the individual rooms for when players grow weary of the constant travel. The only other iffy component, the acting, still exceeds expectations (despite the fact that your only friend in the game grossly overcompensates for an apparent lack of enthusiasm).

Temüjin undoubtedly deserved five solid stars, were it not for the brutality of its navigation scheme. Like an emperor's palace surrounded by a thick wall of brambles, the beauty of its intricate puzzles and stunning sense of immersion is betrayed only by the scratches and wounds required to embrace it. Let's hope SouthPeak can fine tune their grand technology for what we hope will be a long line of adventures to come. *–Anne Royal*

★★★★☆

Temüjin

SouthPeak Interactive • www.southpeak.com • System Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: None

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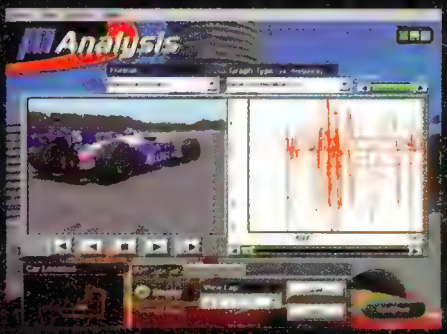

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GOING 140MPH AT LAGUNA SECA YOU "WOW, WHAT A GREAT GAME."

BUSY GOING 140MPH AT LAGUNA SECA.

The Hangar

3D and flight sims: better late than never

The industry has been touting the glories of blazingly fast 3D graphics for quite a while now and the action games like *Quake* have proven the point. This new technology is truly an impressive advance in gaming.

If you've played flight sims long enough, you probably remember shooting down wire-framed bandits that looked more like a poorly twisted coat hanger than an aircraft. There was no way you could really feel like Dick Bong; the disbelief was too overwhelming. A 3D game, especially when coupled with a good 3D accelerator card, provides an incredibly realistic environment with extra effects that help "the suspension of disbelief." Today's new 3D capabilities and effects are so much more efficient at generating that "being there" atmosphere. Alpha blending allows for transparency in pixels, providing great smoke effects; Gouraud shading allows a polygon to have a smoothly changing color gradient, allowing beautiful lighting effects. Fogging lets the programmer limit the virtual world by hazing the horizon, and depth cueing reduces an object's color and intensity as distance increases; both features save CPU cycles by limiting an infinite world. Texture mapping permits a picture to be mapped on a polygon, like the nose art on a fighter. Perspective correction mathematically calculates a bitmap's correct convergence on the far portions of a polygon, a very processor-intensive task that gives a realistic 3D look. Bi-linear texture filtering smoothes out blocky textures, as anti-aliasing does for object edges. Mip-mapping uses multiple versions of the same texture map at different levels of detail as distance changes; this key feature saves many CPU cycles since drawing highly detailed terrain while at 50,000 feet is overkill. Another cycle-saving feature is Z-buffering, a technique that prevents software from uselessly drawing an object that can't be seen, like a tank behind a hill.

[left] This B-17 shot from Fighter Squadron was captured from a screen drawn using a 3D accelerator card. Compare it to the same shot created with the game's 3D software emulator

[below] Eric Parker's Fighter Squadron contains full 3D features like bi-linear filtering with or without a hardware graphics accelerator. This B-17 was created with software alone

What's taking so long? Throw the 3D switch!

Flight simulations seem to have been late to the 3D party. While 3D *Quake* clones arrive almost weekly, flight simulation games with 3D capability are just beginning to land on the store shelves. There are a number of reasons for this and I asked several of the flight sim enthusiast's best friends to help explain it. Bryan Walker, currently working on *Flying Nightmares 2* for Eidos, Doug Kubel, Vice President of Technology for Interactive Magic, Leon Rosenshein, lead programmer on Microprose's *Falcon 4.0* and Eric "Hellcats" Parker, developing *Fighter Squadron: The Screamin' Demons over Europe* for Activision all generously took the time to contribute to this writer's education.

The first step is understanding that 2D games cannot be turned into 3D games with a few changes to the graphics engine. A graphics engine is basically software that takes data, makes pictures from it and then puts it on the user's screen. This data, such as an aircraft model and background, modified by player input and computer AI, constitutes a scene description. The scene description is processed by the graphics engine, generating a screen picture from a particular player viewpoint. A 2D graphics engine considers data simply in terms of "what is in front of what." It manipulates pre-drawn pictures that already exist in its "library" (sprites, backgrounds or icons) into "layers" on the monitor at the appropriate locations. A 3D graphics engine is far more complex; without pre-drawn objects, it uses basic data (a list of triangles) to create the picture. Additionally, the 3D version re-computes the picture every frame to adjust for the direction and distance of the player's viewpoint. To further complicate matters, a 3D game still has to be able to do 2D work, such as drawing a 3D scene and putting a 2D cockpit on top of it. Clearly, "doing 3D" calls for a much more capable graphics engine and lots of computing power.

A Cobra levels an airfield in Eidos' Flying Nightmares 2. This game supports accelerated 3D and will have "native" drivers for most popular cards

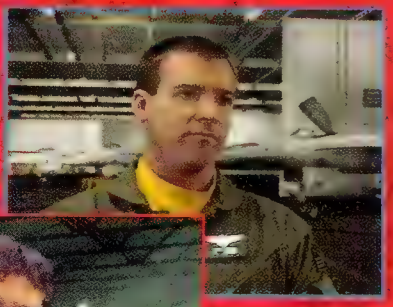
Action is easy; simulation is hard

To put a 3D picture on the screen in any game, triangles have to be processed (3D view converted to 2D triangles), setup (prepared to draw) and filled in (rasterization). Processing and setup are accomplished by the CPU; with current technology, accelerator cards can really only help with the rasterization. Creating new graphics engines to do these tasks for the "shooters" like *Quake* wasn't difficult, but it has taken longer for flight sims due to a fundamental difference in the game environments of the two genres. An action game usually occurs in a relatively small, contained 3D world. Each scene is made up of a few very large polygons (the walls, floor and roof), involving short distances and with a relatively small number of

Конфликт.

Лидеры.

Самолёты.



Пилоты.

Ваш выбор.

JETFIGHTER

FULLBURN

Полёт как рассказ.

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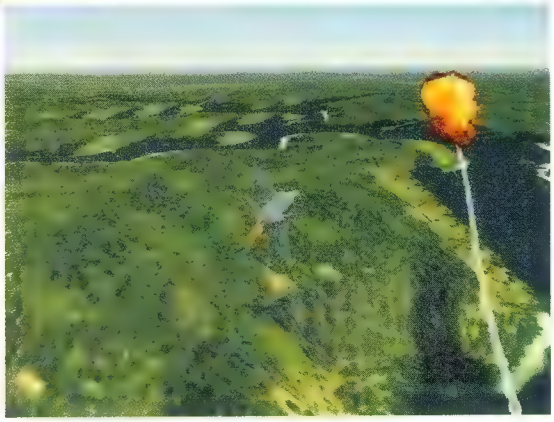
moving, "thinking" characters. The AI tends to be pretty simplistic (the monster is always behind the same door) as is the player's "fight model." While it's more of a CPU load than a 2D version, it's nothing compared to what goes on in a high-end flight simulation. Thus, careful use of available CPU cycles is not as critical and most gamers already have basic hardware that can easily handle the requirements of the game engine, 3D processing and setup. The addition of an average 3D accelerator card can provide impressive 3D graphics at a high frame rate, since there're only a few large polygons to rasterize.

Flight simulations are another level of magnitude in complexity. The graphics engine competes with a very detailed game engine (AI, flight models, sounds, etc.) for CPU time. Many sims include hundreds of aircraft and ground vehicles, advanced AI, a dynamic campaign and "physics" flight models, requiring far more CPU cycles than their rather simplistic action game counterparts. The flight sim's 3D world is also far larger and composed of many small triangles. For example, I-Magic's *iF-22* features 80,000 square miles of terrain per theater; flying from one end to the other requires moving 300 MB of data through the system. Therefore, game engine requirements, processing and setup in a flight sim are far more extensive than in an action game and may cause a bottleneck even before rasterization loads are considered. The graphics engines have to be as efficient as possible and a high-end 3D accelerator card is mandatory if you wish to avoid a "slide show" of air combat. Even with an accelerator speeding the rasterization, many a gamer's current hardware is just not up to the task of running a full-featured 3D flight sim, severely limiting the market potential of many games. That's why so much time has been spent on efficient 3D graphics engines.



[left] This shot from MicroProse's European Air War shows some nice texture-mapping on the checkered nose cowling

[below] 3D Alpha blending effects provide the translucency that allows the ground to show through the F-16 afterburner flame in this Falcon 4.0 shot

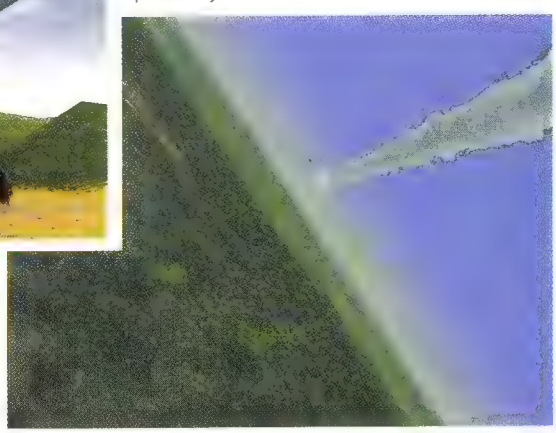
InDirect3D: the long way to connect two points

The delay over designing new graphics engines wasn't the only factor; there's also the 3D Application Programming Interface (API) problem. Graphics APIs are just standardized routines that let a programmer design game software to automatically utilize an accelerator card's features. A few of the better known API's are Microsoft's Direct3D, Silicon Graphics' OpenGL, 3DFX's Glide, and Rendition's RRedline. Obviously, a game developer wants to use an API that supports any brand of accelerator card, and Direct3D has nearly universal support among the card manufacturers. While it does work, it may not be the optimum API for flight simulations. Leon Rosenshein, "the man" for *Falcon 4.0*, reported that, using a 3Dfx card, the Glide version is twice as fast as the Direct3D version. All of the other developers contacted for this article reported similar lukewarm feelings about Direct3D. Even though it appears slower than many other APIs, most developers intend to provide Direct3D drivers for their games due to its widespread support. That way, if a hot new card comes out after a game's release, the game can still utilize the card under Direct3D. Microsoft, of course, continually releases new versions of Direct3D and, given their legendary tenacity, it will probably become efficient.

Meanwhile, most card manufacturers are developing their own APIs, as 3Dfx did with Glide. Game developers are integrating these "native" drivers into their products to insure optimum performance no matter which 3D accelerator card you own. The need for multiple driver support is another reason the 3D flight sims have been trickling into stores; it just that much more work for the design team. These drivers are continually updated, so for optimum performance check your card manufacturer's website for the latest version about every two months.

Developers face still other problems when supporting 3D acceleration. Most current cards have a 2MB texture memory limitation; a sim that uses a large bitmap to texture-map terrain will immediately exceed the card's memory. The graphics engine then has to cache to the hard driver or system memory, causing major lags in frame rate. One way around this is to use a "tiling" system where smaller textures are manipulated and placed on the terrain. It's not as beautiful from high altitude but it works more efficiently with current cards. Another problem is that all cards don't support all the same features. So, if a developer includes superb use of Z-buffering, not all cards may take advantage of that work. Feature sets are finally beginning to stabilize in the industry, so this won't be a problem much longer. Lastly, some cards must do a major mode change when switching back to 2D; they are very slow to draw the 2D cockpit over the 3D scene. This situation should improve as 2D and 3D capabilities are integrated into one card.

Flight simulations are about to start the 3D era in earnest. With the proper card and current drivers you'll be ready to enjoy them. Standby to launch! *–John Nolan*



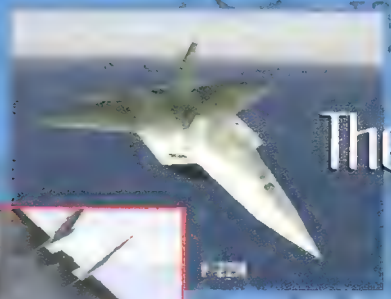
[left to right]

Superb cloud shading effects are shown in this Harrier shot from Flying Nightmares 2.

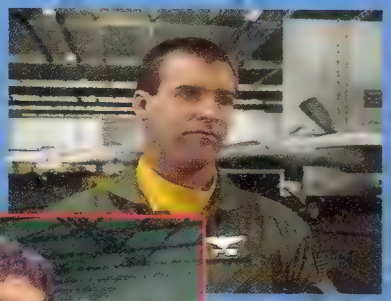
Fogging and depth-cueing effects are clearly shown as you look towards the horizon in this "HUD" shot from MicroProse's Falcon 4.0

The conflict.

The leaders.



The planes.



The pilots.

Your choice.

JETFIGHTER FULL BURN

THE FLIGHT SIM WITH A STORY.

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Air Combat Advisor

Part III: Moving from the BnZ to make the kill

Over the last few months we've covered the conditions that make a turning battle more attractive to a BnZer. But in an effort to avoid stagnating this column with too much detail about one aspect of air combat, let's just discuss a little strategy related to the BnZ-turning dilemma and leave it at that for a while. We'll soon move on to that ever-popular topic—dogfighting. Looking at an air battle from another point of view can not only add perspective, but it'll also help keep things moving as well.

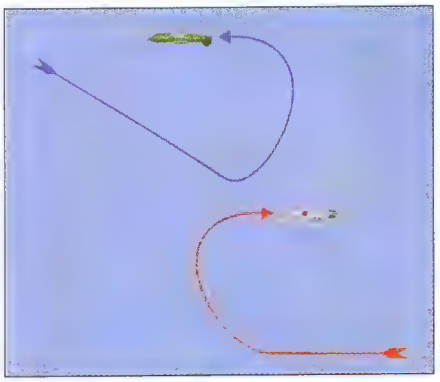
Making opportunities

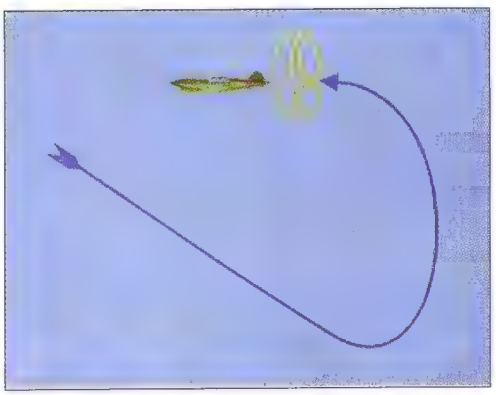
The biggest problem with waiting for the proper conditions to arise (before even considering turning to facilitate a kill) is that the chance of actually coming across such opportunities becomes pretty rare if you're fighting a good pilot. Fortunately there are things you can do to increase the chances of your opponent giving you the opportunity to kill him. What we're talking about is taking a more pro-active role in making the enemy screw up.

We hinted at one such situation last time. If a bandit Immelmans or uses some other extreme vertical maneuver in response to your attack runs, even though his altitude is much higher after an attack, you can be pretty sure that his airspeed will be pretty low at the top of those maneuvers. You can use this principle against him.

Goin' vertical

From our other discussions we know that although there are some major differences with regards to the effects of gravity, vertical maneuvers are really just turns made on the vertical plane. Before we talk about how to lure a bandit into climbing, let's consider the general theory behind the process. Because the bandit is at a much lower airspeed at the top of a vertical maneuver, if you have the energy (E) to climb substantially higher than him and retain enough airspeed to maneuver, three things work in your favor.





[clockwise from far top]

Climbing substantially higher than the bandit when he uses a vertical counter-maneuver usually results with the bandit lacking enough E to raise his nose to shoot at you. You only need to point your nose downward to shoot him and the bandit can only go downward or maneuver away from you because of his lack of E

Because you're more interested in altitude rather than a nice round entry leg shape, the vertical Immelman has a more elongated shape (where you pull more or less straight up)

The hammerhead uses the rudder to make the turn at the top as you near stall. This makes it a relatively dangerous maneuver because your airspeed is very low on E at the top— making regaining airspeed for turning tough, and zoom escapes nearly impossible

First the bandit won't have the E to raise his nose high enough to shoot at you if you're relatively (proportionate to the bandit's E state) high enough above him after your climb. Naturally this situation is desirable because being in a place where you can't be shot at is the next best thing to the enemy being totally out of ammo.

The second point is that even if your E state is as low as the bandit's after your climb, because the bandit is below you, you will generally have enough E to accomplish your goal—shoot the bandit. This is because you only need to point your nose more or less downward to shoot at him, and it takes a lot less E to lower your nose than it does (as in the lower bandit's case) to raise it.

Finally, because you're now more or less setup in the vertical BnZ position and the bandit has no option but to maneuver away from you due to his lack of E, your chances of gaining a head-to-tail shot at him have increased. That's because the only way the bandit can avoid this bad situation (for him) is to raise his nose to meet you head-on when you dive on him. Of course his lack of E will make this nearly impossible—but not always. (More about that next time.)

Gettin' high

Climbing above a lower opponent seems pretty straightforward when you're BnZing. That's because you have the E advantage. And even though it's pretty easy to believe that all you need to do is simply pull back on the stick, being a little more selective by using some maneuvers can yield advantages. Just as with anything else in air combat, your E state will dictate what maneuver is best for your situation.

Pilots that have a good amount of E tend to use vertical maneuvers that can be best described as a *very* high yo-yo or a vertical Immelman (pulling more or less straight up). If you're marginal on E, you can use a high wing over or a hammerhead (the latter is dangerous because you're almost stalled at the top).

More next time. Until then—he who only fights to the bitter end will eventually find himself at the end, bitter. *–Ben Chiu*

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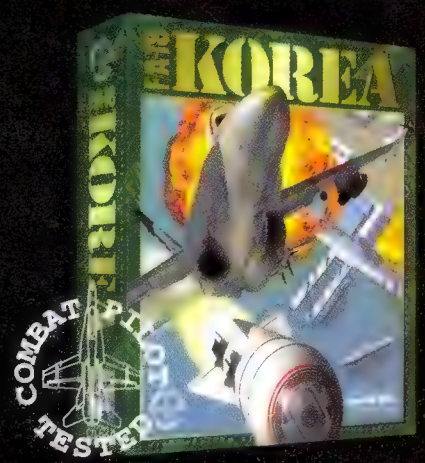


GRAPHIC SIMULATIONS CORPORATION

Starfleet Academy

"Make it so-so"

Once upon a time, in a galaxy fa-... uh, a TV show took the world by storm. Members of the crew became instant idols to millions of fans. Featuring a sagely captain, a first officer with aerodynamic lobes, riveting adventures and special effects unheard of for its time, the show gained unbelievable notoriety across the globe.

But, as with all fads, the popularity around *The Love Boat* eventually died down, leaving us once again to feast our eyes on *Star Trek* re-runs. Now, Interplay Productions has teamed up with Paramount to give us *Starfleet Academy*, by far the most action oriented *Star Trek* game yet created.

As a junior cadet entering the academy, the game focuses foremost on your advancement in both leadership skill and learning the "Federation Way." As a side plot of sorts, cut scenes reveal some of the subtleties of crew dynamics, especially the cultural and ethnic tensions intertwined therein. During the later missions, these skills play a major part in resolving crisis situations throughout the vast reaches of space. Whether it's rescuing high profile dignitaries or returning that delinquent copy of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* to the Federation archives so Spock can check it out, each mission unveils ulterior objectives less obvious than one might think.

The lengthy introduction makes liberal use of full motion video. Though technically uninspiring, the content of this video clip goes a long way in portraying the academy as a prestigious and honorable establishment reserved for the elite. A stirring speech (i.e. stir your coffee while he rambles) from Commander Sulu, played by actor George Takei himself, sets a tone of somber responsibility in preparing cadets for the daily rigors of academy life.

A chill runs down the spine when first encountering the same Dolby Stereo signature audio clip played in movie theaters. It's not a chill derived from mood, but rather the crispness and clarity of the warp engines that rattle your speakers, knocking the bowl of ice cream off the bookshelf and down your back. If sound alone determined the value of a game, *Starfleet Academy* would possess no equal, not just for the quality of sound, but also the precision and accuracy of each audio piece in relation to its television counterpart. Blips, beeps, status reports from your crew, warp concussions when leaving a system – all familiar pieces any Trekker would instantly recognize.

Any of several Federation craft can be flown by players. Among them are the Constitution, Miranda, Oberth, and Excelsior class starships. Each one has differing levels of armor, weapons power, and maneuverability. All of them, however, house one of the game's better points: the ship stations.

The damage control station offers sliding bars to prioritize repairs on certain systems requiring immediate attention (life support, for example, might be a good first choice). The navigation room displays the entire star system in varying zoom levels. Though the need to manually set coordinates rarely occurs (many way points are set automatically by your navigation officer), just being *able* to makes a great statement about the attention to detail in this game. The ships' library alcove keeps players up to date with a comprehensive database of ships, planets and encrypted instructions for assembling a phaser from fluorescent tubing, *Velveeta* and your *Diablo* save game files.

In any of these ship stations, modeled in painstaking detail, the consoles are alive and ready for manipulation. True, many of these screens will experience only occasional use during the course of the game. Their presence, though, seems a welcome tribute and allows Trekkers greater freedom to role-play each particular function of general ship operations.

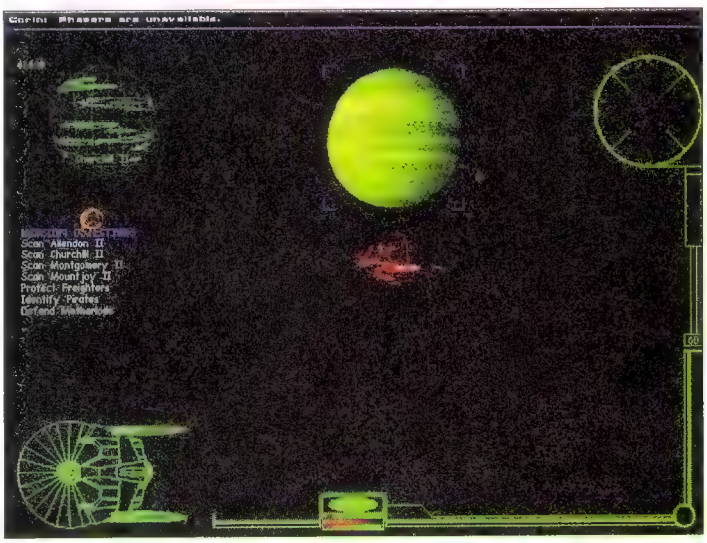
The majority of time spent at the academy involves space flight and combat, and it's in this realm where radiation from the warp core begins to breach hull integrity. Though not glaringly shabby, the 3D engine suffers from its age, rendering ships and planets in adequate detail while failing to do justice to flight mechanics. Not since early *Wing Commanders* have we seen a flight engine still making use of the "bounding box." Flying within a ship's, station's, or planet's invisible box triggers the collision routine, even if you've missed the actual structure by four parsecs plus rental car mileage. To add *tlch* to *oy*, as Worf would say in his native tongue, Federation ships known to be slow and bulky seem capable of lightning fast maneuvers. This impossible agility won't go unnoticed by *Star Trek* purists accustomed to using prescribed tactical maneuvers, rather than Kilrathi propulsion systems, to survive combat.

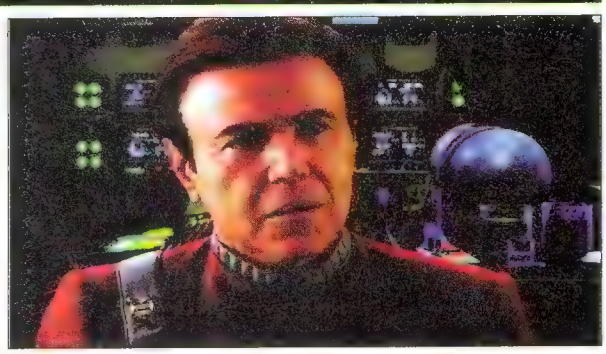
Missions branch off in unexpected ways, adding some nice twists to the game and helping it avoid the stigma of being just another space shooter. Hailing Starfleet Command for guidance helps sometimes, but in many instances players decide a course of action based solely on how they believe the *Star Trek* universe would dictate. This becomes a two-edged sword in that the assignments can quickly degenerate into trial and error sessions. Do a mission. Return home. Get yelled at. Try again. Get yelled at for something else. Try again. Get yelled at. Staple two bread sticks to the CD-ROM, and send your new miniature *U.S.S Enterprise* into the neighbor's hot tub. Get yelled at.

[top to bottom]

Multiple objectives (many unknown during briefing) keep minds thinking, not firing

Chekov ponders the whereabouts of Kirk's toupee





"This bully takes every other air combat sim I've played, sucker-punches 'em and then shoves their faces into the dirt. Hard."
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While only *Star Trek* disciples will catch the occasional incorrect phrase or term (like "radar" replacing "sensors"), several missions dictate objectives and actions contextually implausible or just plain confusing. Right off the bat in mission two, for example, players are given an order which they *must* disobey to complete the mission. Do you destroy the radioactive artifact hurtling towards a populated planet per the Federation mandate? Or disobey orders, with little more than a subtle cue from your commanding officer during mission briefing? In the *Star Trek* universe, right and wrong aren't often clearly defined, but never in the history of Starfleet Command has direct disobedience of orders been *sanctioned* as an acceptable practice, much less taught as a component of the regular curriculum.

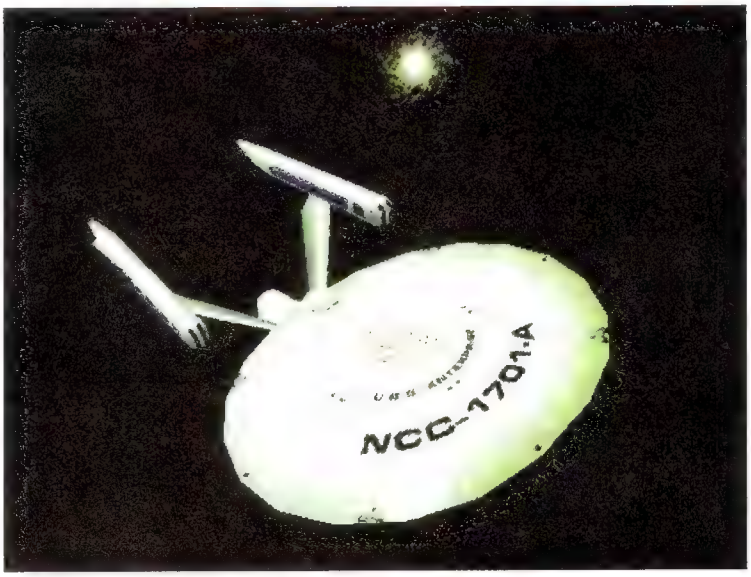
Then there's Kirk. Good old Captain James Tiberius Kirk. William Shatner returns fresh from a cameo role in the ill-fated *TekWar* to astound us once again with his acting prowess. Tally up some tenacity points for gamers who can watch him choke through his basic lines without paying homage to the *Imodium* podium. The other lesser-known cast members fare much better, though none should expect a star on Hollywood Boulevard anytime soon (except maybe the bartender).

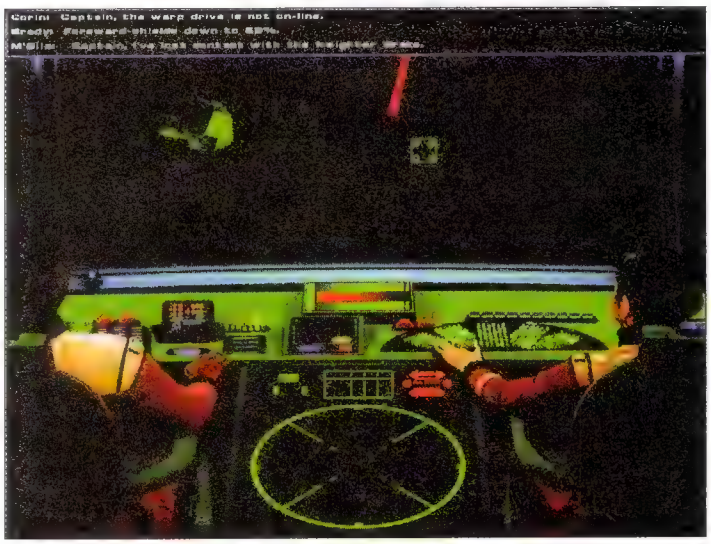
With missions strung together in singular fashion, solo play lacks the coveted element of longevity. Not so with the multi-player, however. It most certainly required forethought from the designers in determining how to create a compelling multi-player environment without compromising the integrity of the *Star Trek* name. Fearing the reduction of *Starfleet Academy* from its noble history into a *Star Wars* style of militaristic death matching, Interplay instead wove strategy, action, and exploration elements into the multi-player experience. The required usage of brain power might stifle the general interest of frenetic frag fiends, or folks bent on sweet talking Dr. Crusher into the "specially programmed" Holodeck. It will, however, provide refreshing relief for those wishing to play the multi-player game properly, in the spirit of Gene Roddenberry's visionary universe. Though a far cry from the full-featured space exploration and conquest games on the market, this game still presents the multi-player experience as an extension, rather than a rehash, of the single player component.

Rendering a verdict on the success of *Starfleet Academy* primarily depends on your familiarity with its roots. Folks who can't tell The Promenade from lemonade will disregard the richness and accuracy of its presentation. They'll question *Starfleet Academy*'s aging engine and sometimes confusing directives. However, they'll also be capable of looking past its contextual discrepancies to enjoy a great story amid some interesting combat situations that don't always boil down to who's shield is bigger, and who uses it more often.

On the other hand, folks who enlisted in "Vulcan as a second language" courses in college will find themselves flinching at the arcade style of play. Certainly, *Starfleet Academy* isn't built solely upon military conquest and ruthless combat without consequence, but it may skirt the edge of arcade action too closely for many fans. In the end, who will be thoroughly pleased with this title? Probably nobody. Having the eerily powerful endorsement of the *Star Trek* license, who will purchase this title? Probably everybody.

Starfleet Academy is to many prior *Star Trek* related games what rancid filet mignon is to asbestos. The latter were bad enough that the former looks drastically better. Whether you'll "Klingon" to it for days, or get "Borg" with it in hours depends mostly on your background and willingness to overlook its flaws and antiquated features. Blemishes aside, the game represents the spirit of *Star Trek* in laudable fashion, balancing the thrill of space conflict with the wisdom of a timeless legacy spanning four decades. Make no mistake, though, this game ain't no Seven of Nine ("Assimilate me, baby!"). *–by Tim Royal*





[top to bottom]

Don't worry, we'll get Dr. McCoy to detach a prescription for some Clearasil right away

The Enterprise in all its glory

The auto-tracking option works well within its limits, though some folks may wish to turn it off to increase the challenge

★★★☆☆

Star Trek Starfleet Academy

Interplay Productions • www.interplay.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, LAN, modem, serial

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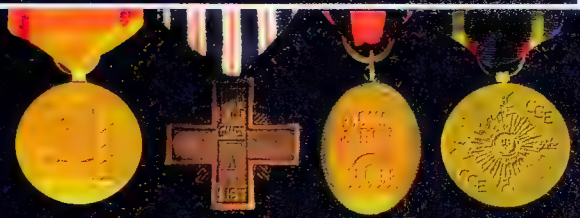

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Flight Simulator 98

Microsoft delivers its most significant flight simulator upgrade in many years

The electric-chopping sound roars in your ears as your Microsoft *Flight Simulator 98* airplane-dashboard appears on your screen. You lift off at two MPH and your airplane starts lunging in all directions simultaneously…your feet move on the rudder pedals like those of a mad dancer. Finally with deft movements, you get your airplane under control and on its way. That's right, this is a helicopter! The new *Flight Simulator 98* is conditional roaring success. It adds many new features that no one will want to miss if they can accept some limitations.

The most striking addition is support for Direct3D, MMX, and force feedback joystick systems. With a dedicated 3D-accelerator card (such as a 3Dfx card), frame rates and details are much improved over past versions. With it, you get acceptable frame rates, clean runway edges, wispy clouds and a much less pixelated ground (the terrain model, however, is pretty much the same as before). The sea becomes smooth with much less flickering from the landscape. The change is quite startling.

Another superb change is the new flight modeling. Now, you can do accurate snap rolls and the airplanes feel right to fly. The Extra 300 aerobatics airplane now rolls correctly and is extremely sensitive, yet incredibly positive, on the controls. The Cessna 182s are now (correctly) more stable. Microsoft has added the Bell 206 helicopter, which is probably the most entertaining addition. This is one exciting, accurate, unstable machine. Flying it is like balancing a top on the head of a pin. It adds a whole new dimension to *Flight Simulator 98*.

New sounds have been added; for example, the glider now has the correct roaring sound (they are louder than you might think). All sounds are reworked and are fantastic. The sound of the helicopter scraping along the tarmac is unforgettable.

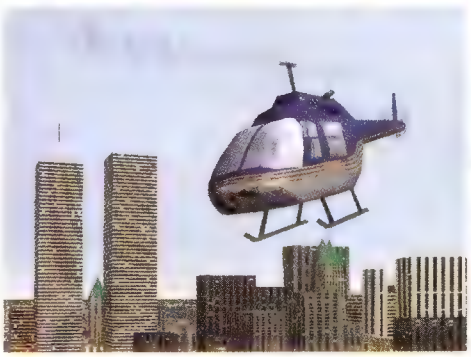
Flight Simulator 98 now includes free Internet play at Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone (www.zone.com). LAN and modem play are also supported, adding much more play value and depth.

Microsoft has added or includes many other features as well. You can now fly to 3000 airports and 45 cities, further extending the appeal of this simulator. The radio stack is now separate and can be given its own window, freeing up a lot of fiddling when flying.

However, *Flight Simulator 98* also has some potentially severe downsides. For one, you had better have a dedicated 3D card, such as the Diamond Monster 3D. Even with a Monster 3D card, a 200MHz Pentium and 32 MB of RAM, you can experience choppy frame rate with all details enabled in highly detailed terrain (however, it is not overly distracting). People with slower systems, of course, might really notice a frame rate problem.

Another bad (and perhaps even fatal) problem is the written manual. It is awfully skimpy at only seven pages, excluding the map section. This is for a simulator that requires players to master a lot of detail to play effectively. When you look something up in the online manual while flying, it's easy to lose your train of thought by the time you get back to flying [and the author is an 800 hour commercial instrument-rated pilot]. Microsoft needs to include a detailed paper manual. Another small but important problem is that the B737 jetliner has brakes and thrust reversers that are much too strong, according to people who fly it. This means that it can land at impossibly small airfields, which hurts realism.

Should you buy this update? If you have a 3D card, it is definitely worth it. If you want to fly the best personal computer helicopter flight model on the market, buy it. However, if you have a slower system, have no 3D card support, need a written manual or have no interest in flying an exciting helicopter, you might want to pass. Still, this is the most significant *Flight Simulator* update in many years. *–Richard Ordway*



[clockwise from left]

Multiplayer is now a blast

All aircraft have new instrument panels

Want to fly this Lear jet?

Flying this Bell helicopter adds a whole new dimension to Flight Simulator 98

★★★★☆

Flight Simulator 98

Microsoft • www.microsoft.com • Requirements: Windows 95 or NT 4.0, 486DX2/66 or higher, 8 MB of RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem, serial

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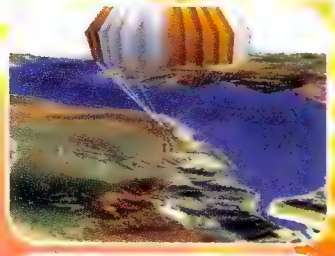

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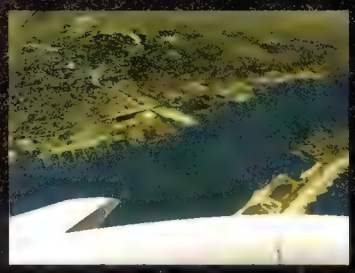

WE DIDN'T SET OUT TO JUST A SMALL PART OF

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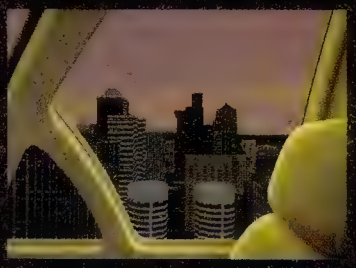

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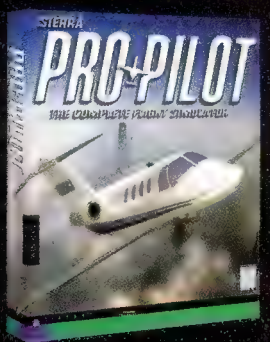

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EF2000 Version 2.0

War in Scandinavia revisited

In my mind, the telling test in determining a quality simulation is how long it stays on your hard drive; with the original *EF2000* that was nearly three years, until quite recently. I just replaced it with *EF 2000 Version 2.0*, the expanded version of one of the best flight sims of all time. Praised when released for great graphics, accurate portrayal of the Eurofighter systems and the overall fun factor, this stand-alone product expands on the original, adding 3D graphics, a fantastic mission planner and a bundle of other minor fixes and enhancements.

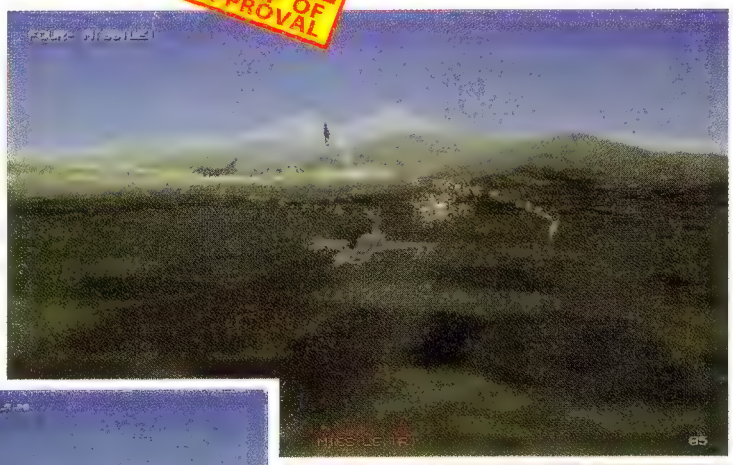
For those not familiar with the original this sim puts you in the seat of the next generation Eurofighter, a single-seat multirole jet fighter. Missions and the campaign occur over Scandinavia and center around theoretical invasion of Norway by Russian forces. A very complete and detailed flight model and a multitude of controls give a realistic experience when flying this jet. Excellent situation awareness in combat is achieved through a wide variety of view angles from the cockpit. Mission conditions run the whole gamut, with an emphasis on strike missions; strike missions are also the core of the new tactical mission planner.

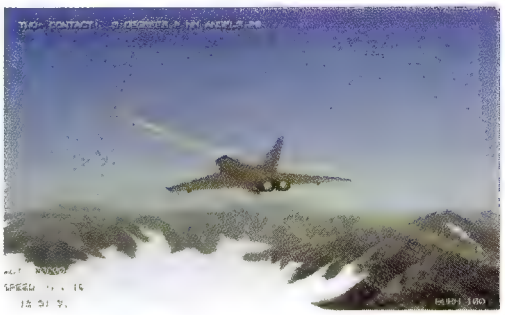
Included on the single CD is the DOS version, a Windows95 version and the new Graphics + version that supports the 3Dfx and Rendition chipsets directly. Installation is much smoother than the original –which gave many people fits – though there still is a separate setup screen for the Graphics + version. With the Graphics + and a 3Dfx card on a Pentium 133, framerate is very smooth on the highest detail levels; the surrounding countryside and skies are noticeably better than the original. Missile smoke trails and explosions also gain from this graphics enhancement.

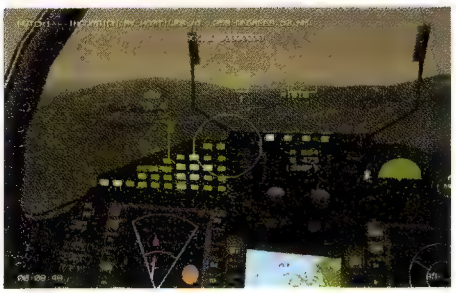
The highlight of this package is the tactical mission planner, an integrated mission designer giving you complete control over every aspect of your missions. For the first time ever in a flight sim I almost enjoyed planning missions more than flying them. Besides just setting waypoint locations and targets, waypoint altitudes are adjustable using a nice graphical elevation chart. Targeted areas are located on the map and then individual targets are chosen for you and your wingmen. A flyby 3D view of the targeted object helps in identification purposes when assigning it and is a great memory aid when attempting to locate it while in the air. Abundant information, including operational status of a target and the previous number of times targeted by an airstrike, makes bombing runs a snap. Using the Air Traffic Control (ATC) screen, airstrip weather and lighting conditions may be checked and then exact take-off times chosen.

Minor features also abound in this version, with additions to the viewing systems including improved missile views and a "SmartView" camera system that cuts to the action around you as the mission is played out. The air-to-air combat menu can put you in a dogfight under a myriad of conditions (all chosen by the player). Weather, altitude, number of planes and enemy type and difficulty may all be factored in for dogfight training. When starting a campaign a difficulty level is available, making combat much easier for the novice flyer. Multiplayer capability now allows for both co-operative and head-to-head battles over a network or modem. When using the Windows 95 version, play is also available directly over the Internet or via the Total Entertainment Network (TEN). Joystick control, including better keystroke support for Thustmaster programmable sticks has been greatly improved. Another major plus for this package, so often lacking of late, is the amount of documentation. With over 500 pages, divided between the manual and a cut down Simtech strategy guide, information abounds.

Negatives are a tough find for this title. A larger campaign, maybe extending into central Europe, would be a nice addition and larger, more visible tracer fire from the cannon would be a welcome touch. For those who own the original, having to purchase an entire new game for the Graphics + and Tactical Mission Planner might seem to be a little steep. But for those who have never experienced dogfights over the fjords of Scandinavia this is a top of the line package for any flight-sim enthusiast and a program that will easily reside on your machine for a long while. *-Jim Pedicord*







[clockwise from right]

Evading an incoming missile

Cockpit view with superimposed HUD

Dogfight over the skies of Scandinavia

Missiles away over a Norwegian glacier

★★★★½

EF2000 Version 2.0

Ocean • www.did.com/ • www.oceanltd.com/ • Requirements: DOS, Windows 95, 75 MHz Pentium or higher, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet (via TEN), LAN, modem, serial

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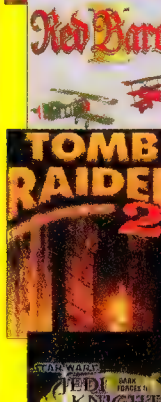

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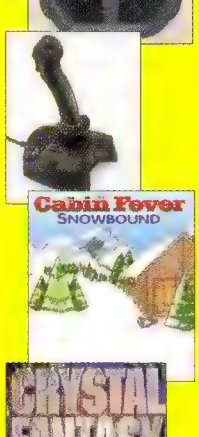

'JOYSWITCH' Now you can jump from joystick to joystick, game to game with the speed and ease of turning a switch. No more reaching behind your computer to swap joystick cables on the game port. Joyswitch does it all.

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'CH RACING SYSTEM' Become a road warrior with the system that was built for speed and durability. System comes complete with a high-performance racing wheel with 160 degree range of motion, four push buttons and foot pedals for acceleration and braking.

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'CRYSTAL FANTASY' Venture through the cave of lust and find the secret crystal. Interact with the sexiest young jewels of the MacDaddy harem. Take snapshots of the girls and play with them in your own private portfolio.

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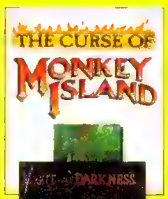

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Links LS 98 Course Disks

The voluminous Links course library continues to grow

One of the reasons that *Links LS 98* is so popular is the huge number of add-on courses available. It seems that almost every tournament you see on television can be replayed on your computer with *Links*. With the golf season drawing to a close across much of the country, forcing many to retreat to the computer for their golf fix, what better time to check out some new places to play while dreaming of spring?

One of the most dramatic moments in golf this year was Davis Love III's PGA victory, dedicated to his late father and culminating with his final putt on a rainbow highlighted 18th green. The primary selling point of the Sea Island course is it's inclusion of Love, who is then available for play on any of your *Links* courses. Love appears to be a fairly low key player on the PGA tour, and he seems low key here: his comments are pretty much restricted to an occasional "Aw, come on!" or "Darn!" Still, he plays a mean game of golf and is a welcome addition, doubling the number of pros available in *LS 98* (the other is Arnold Palmer, who comes with the original program).

Love's home course, *Sea Island*, reminds me why so many *Links* courses seem indistinguishable from each other: there's very little discernible height or slope on the fairways, making many of the wide, flat holes fairly unmemorable. The approach shot from most of the fairways feels no different from the previous or subsequent hole. The combination of these ho-hum fairways and the large greens makes *Sea Island* a pretty easy course. However, the holes which feature lakes, and in particular the beautiful par three number two, display *LS 98*'s realistic and often gorgeous reflecting water. Still, *Sea Island* is, on the whole, a pretty monotonous course; the best thing about the disk is the acquisition of Davis Love III.

Congressional Country Club, located just outside Washington, D.C., has been the home course of numerous presidents and was the location of the 1997 U.S. Open. Unlike many *Links* courses, Congressional's fairways are sloped and contoured, resulting in a much more distinctive (and enjoyable) character. The greens are large and tend to be rather hilly, resulting in many three-putt opportunities. Congressional is close to an airport and thus the sound of airplanes flying low is common. Congressional's signature holes are its finishing 17th and 18th; it was on these two holes that this year's U.S. Open was decided in a tense and emotional finish. Both holes are perfectly reproduced here, and each once again shows off *LS 98*'s magnificent reflecting water effects. While some of the holes are routine in their layout, the aforementioned use of contour and height produces an enhanced feeling of realism and interest. Overall, this is a challenging and enjoyable course.

Pelican Hill, in Newport Coast, California, boasts a green fee of $175 a round; if the real course is as spectacular as the version presented here, it is well worth the cost. The first hole establishes the nature of the course—it features an incredible downhill, sloped fairway lined with a variety of trees and shrubs. The par three number four hole is one of many beginning on an elevated tee, hitting down onto a green set in a valley carved out of the canyons and bluffs. The sounds of the surf from the adjacent Pacific Ocean in the background are a reminder that this course is on the California coast, a fact that could sometimes be lost as several of the holes look as though they could be set in one of the western mountain resorts. *Pelican Hill* is composed of a variety of holes with unique designs, many requiring a good dose of course management—tempting high risks shots are available, which may result in a birdie or eagle if successful, a double bogie if hit less than perfectly. This combination of hills and valleys, beautifully varied terrain, and holes which may be played a number of different ways make *Pelican Hill* an absolute must have disk for the *Links* aficionado. *–Jeff Lackey*

[clockwise from above]

This hole on the Sea Island course demonstrates Links LS 98's gorgeous reflecting water display

The 17th at Congressional: there's water hiding behind the green

Pelican Hill provides some of the most interesting holes in the Links course library

★★★☆☆

Links LS98 Course Disks: Sea Island (with Davis Love III)
Access Software • www.accesssoftware.com • Requirements: Links LS 98 • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem

★★★★☆

Links LS98 Course Disks: Congressional CC
Access Software • www.accesssoftware.com • Requirements: Links LS 98 • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem

★★★★★

Links LS98 Course Disks: Pelican Hill
Access Software • www.accesssoftware.com • Requirements: Links LS 98 • Multiplayer: 2-8 players, Internet, LAN, modem

Legends Football '98

Rushed to the market a year too late

A mess of a product, *Legends Football '98* features an interesting premise that's completely derailed by poor execution. When looking at the final product, you have to wonder who Accolade thinks will be interested in this game. The gamepad-only interface and hyper-inflated offense scream "console," while the historical premise screams "simulation." Does the console kid want to be Red Grange or Brett Favre? Does the simulation fan even own a gamepad?

The interface is a particularly sore point. The mouse isn't used at all in the game—a tedious gamepad interface forces you to use its D-pad to cycle through all of the game's options. To add insult to injury, plays are color-coded to the Gravis Gamepad, which leaves SideWinder or any other competing gamepad owners translating the scheme.

The color-coded play-calling interface is simple to use – assuming you own a Gravis Gamepad

Actual gameplay is moderately entertaining in an arcade sort of way, though what occurs on the field bears only the slightest resemblance to football. Play calling is simple, passing is well done (each button corresponds to a different receiver in the patter), and the line play is decent. The problem is the computer AI, or lack thereof. You can easily roll up 100-plus points on offense by running a lot of sweeps and throwing deep passes. On defense, just call the same play and blitz a linebacker every down. (The center always moves right before the snap—just time your rush with his first movement.)

What *Legends '98* has going for it—the ability to play in multiple eras using the rules of that era, a good play editor and a career mode for modern teams—is wasted on a simulation engine that produces inflated NBA-like scores. Typical games feature scores such as 83-78, with quarterbacks throwing for, on average, 800 yards with anywhere from 6-12 touchdown passes. Losing QBs often throw double-digit interceptions.

Ill-conceived and poorly executed, *Legends '98* is that rare product that makes you long for the days of Accolade's previous football series *Unnecessary Roughness*.

–Steve Bauman

★☆☆☆☆

Legends Football '98

Accolade • www.accolade.com • Requirements: Windows 95, 90MHz Pentium or higher, 8MB of RAM, 2X CD-ROM • Multiplayer: 2 players, same machine

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Going digital

Logitech takes aim at Microsoft with a new pair of digital controllers

It's surprising more control makers haven't joined the digital revolution. Compared to analog controllers, digital controllers use less CPU time, are more responsive and offer more precision. Yet for nearly two years, the only digital game controllers on the market were built by Microsoft (in fact, one could say they had a monopoly in this field). That has now changed, as Logitech has released two new digital controllers of its own: the WingMan Extreme Digital and the ThunderPad Digital.

The WingMan Extreme Digital is a digital version of the company's WingMan Extreme. It sports the same look and feel as its predecessor, and those with small hands will particularly enjoy not having to stretch as everything is within easy reach. It has six buttons (all programmable in Windows 95), a hat switch and a throttle.

WingMan Extreme Digital

While hard core flight simmers may flock to the more full-featured flight sticks, the WingMan Extreme Digital is a solid choice for everyday gamers. For DOS games, the stick is compatible with the CH Flightstick Pro. The only problem with the device is that it doesn't feel as sturdy as it could. The ThunderPad Digital is a sleek, eight-button gamepad. The buttons, which are programmable in Windows 95, are comfortably placed and the entire thing conforms nicely to one's hands. While nothing revolutionary, the ThunderPad Digital is a solid performer.

ThunderPad Digital

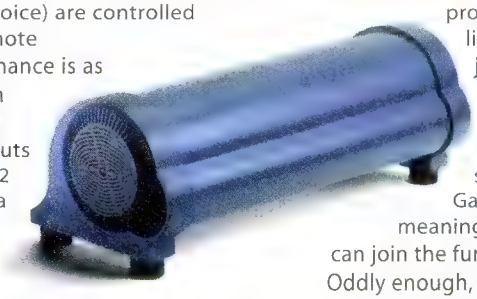
Both controllers feature Plug & Play installation. The Logitech control panel allows for easily programmability and even lets you print out a full color map of all the buttons for a particular game. *–Jason Ocampo*

Wingman Digital Extreme
ThunderPad Digital
Logitech • www.logitech.com

MS5 Bazooka

Boom! Boom! Ka-Boom!

The MS5 is a subwoofer designed for computers, game consoles, and other portable or semi-portable electronic devices. At just over 17 inches long by about seven inches wide, the MS5 fits easily into the confined spaces often associated with PC setups. Installation itself is a snap, the directions are clear, and the unit includes all required cables. Once hooked up, on/off, volume and use (game, music, voice) are controlled by a cabled remote control. Performance is as advertised, with clean, powerful bass (the unit puts out 50 watts @ 2 ohms); the extra oomph is quite satisfying and effective. Overall, a well-built, solid piece of equipment. *–Robert Mayer*



MS5 Bazooka Multimedia Subwoofer
Southern Audio Services, Inc. • www.sas-bazooka.com • 1-800-THE-TUBE

CH Gamestick

Good performance, beautiful design

The Gamestick is a stylish, medium-cost ($59.95 SRP) joystick from CH, makers of the legendary Flightstick line of products. This lightweight joystick features a four-button design and a sliding throttle, but no hat. Unlike most joysticks, the layout of the Gamestick is symmetrical, meaning lefties as well as righties can join the fun.

CH Gamestick

Oddly enough, its lack of weight and the smooth plastic makes the joystick feel a bit on the cheap side. The cheapness issue is a feeling based primarily on the texture of the plastic – comparing the Microsoft Gamepad with it's coarse texture with the smooth, plastic-y Gamestick, really illustrates the point. The base isn't weighted enough to make it a great joystick for desktop use (though it's better for those that hold a stick in their lap – ignore any crude sexual innuendoes at this point).

In use, it feels a lot like a good old Flightstick with a superbly designed handle. It's still an analog stick, so it needs to be calibrated under Windows 95, but its excellent ergonomics and simple design make it a good choice for action gamers. *–Steve Bauman*

CH Gamestick
CH Products • www.ch.com

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Flame-free zone

Let me congratulate you on having the guts to write on a subject that has been long overdue [*Upfront, CGS+ 84*]. All the crap that appears here on the net makes me long for the moderated games forum that Scorpia used to have on GEnie. I think that most real gamers want discussion groups to be a source of information, both from fellow gamers and the folks involved in game design, so that our gaming experience can be enhanced.

The flame wars that go on are thinly disguised libel and make you question whether some of the posters aren't employed by a publisher's competitor to spread disinformation. (If they aren't, it makes you wish that the government would require a license to use the net to protect the rest of us from psychopaths and juveniles using their mommy's computer irresponsibly.)

Keep on having the courage to express what a lot of us are thinking but don't have as large a forum as you do.

Joseph Hermsen
Via Internet

As always, the editorial is the first section of the magazine that I read. I agree 100% that some Usenet posts have been way too harsh against your name and person.

You should have mentioned that not all of the Usenet community are malicious malcontents – try spending some time in alt.games.wargames. It's a decent, smaller group with no idiotic flame wars. You may be pleasantly surprised.

However, communism is not the worst thing to be accused of–it is, however, one of the silliest. Even if you were the son of Lenin, I'd still enjoy the magazine.

Dr. Atomic
Via Internet

Regarding the editorial by in *Computer Games Strategy Plus* November 1997 [*issue 84*] issue on the problem of anonymous persons directing venom in such a way that it discourages industry people from participating in online discussions.

Cyberspace is a microcosm of the real world, in which we do not know that someone is seriously disturbed until they act crazy, but there are gradations of this. The folks who run many on-line forums make their bucks by providing access to anyone – it does not matter if they are a highly educated but disturbed individual like the Unabomber.

Even if a responsible ISP or on-line service was to cut off the account of a person by reason of insanity behavior on-line, the worst threats just get another account with same or different service. There has to be the will, on the part of the service providers, to participate in some kind of joint blackballing of certain types of offenders, like retail stores post photographs in their offices out of sight of the public of people in their community that have been arrested for shop lifting.

It is evident that the industry is nowhere close to this kind of thinking from the way many are supporting junk commercial and pornographic advertising. Here I am on America Online, which markets itself as a family service, excellent for young children, but there are stories about AOL selling its membership lists to the junk mailers, and a lot of the junk is telling us about pornographic web sites, and how to commit a variety of crimes. This is also true of the major telephone services. It is damn near impossible to get their cooperation in fighting abuses, because they make money off the abuses.

Al Macintyre
Via Internet

Flesh Feast not so yummy

This is my first letter to any game magazine. I finally had to speak up on what I've been seeing lately. I'm a 43 year old game player that has been at it since the Atari 2600 was all the rage. I enjoy many types of games and since violence is a part of about 99% of all games I've seen my share of it. I'm not going to jump on a soapbox about the validity of violence in games, but I would like everyone to stop for a minute, pick up Issue 84, Nov. 1997 and turn to page 46.

Ask yourself why would anyone want to see images like this. Why would this ad pull someone in and entice them into buying the game. If your 13 year old son or daughter was excited at the prospect of playing this game, wouldn't you be the least bit concerned? My concern is that the constant, increasingly graphic nature of these ads is getting way out of control. When will someone in a position of authority finally say enough and at least limit the amount of gore being displayed. If someone wants to buy a hack and slash game that's OK with me, but please, don't make me put up with images like this when I don't want it.

I realize that the majority of your readers are probably in the 15 year old range and that the more shock you can feed them the better initial sales are. Someone, please stand up and make a difference for the healthy, positive side of our mental psyche, I'm afraid we are getting addicted to shock and can't stop.

Rick Blythe
Via Internet

We are in the process of evaluating our position with regards to violent content in ads. It's a complex problem – our average reader is over 30 years old, but you'd never know it based on the content of some of the ads. They seem trapped in adolescence. A question for SegaSoft – who do you *think your market is? –ed*

Reviewing the reviewers of the reviews

In the current issue [*CGS+ 84*], Pascal Vin voices his opinion that *Computer Games* was too tough on Interactive Magic in the review of *iF-22*. He would have awarded four stars.

I disagree. I just deleted the program from my machine and tossed the CD back in the box after a month of hassle. On a 200MHz MMX machine with 32MB of RAM and a fast hard drive, this sim flies like a washing machine. It stutters and gurgles and stepped out of the box more often than a rookie facing Nolan Ryan's fastball.

The recently released patch didn't help matters one whit. It might have even made things a little worse. This sim offered great possibilities, but a program which has to stop every half mile to gather its wind is not an interesting program to fly.

Your rating was a tad high in my opinion. 2.5 stars would have been plenty, and the half star was only because of the handsome cockpit graphics. I-Magic should have kept this in the barn 'til it flew at least decently. Good going … you were right on target.

Phil "Babe" Warner
Via Internet

More pictures

I have been a reader of *CGS+* for four years now and find the recent response by the editor to criticism voiced by Mr Mackey to have missed an important point. While the

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criticism unduly chastises for the amount of written word, I think Mackey is on target that the magazine game reviews could incorporate a few more representatives pictures frames so we the readers can judge the graphics ourselves. In this case, a picture would truly be worth a thousand words.

Melvin Kirkland
Via Internet

Agreed, but how many games don't *look good in pictures? How many people have purchased a game based on its graphics and been disgusted with its lack of gameplay? This is what the text is for. Besides, most of our reviews have three or more pictures – only the short reviews have fewer – and they are usually chosen to be representative of as many aspects of the game as possible. –ed*

An error on the Links

Usually I agree with most of your articles; however, after reading through the October '97 issue [*CGS+ 83*], I did something I usually don't do. I read the sports related games reviews. My brother-in-law plays *Links 98* like a true addict. I've been asking him to get into a self-help group for months. I am not a real fan of sports games myself, but I have watched him play it for hours on end, and have to say, that it is good as golf on a computer can get.

I was reading your review of the game, mostly because I noticed that it only received 3/5 stars. Wondering why, I read the rest. I agreed with most of the complaints registered, except for one in particular. Jeff Lackey stated that "Mplayer Internet play is not working as of this writing." I would really hope this did not attribute to the 3/5 rating. Mplayer, the last time I checked, has basically nothing to do with Access, and in my humble opinion, Mplayers shortcomings should not count against a game that appears in its services.

Kit
Via Internet

The rating was incorrect. It should have been 4/5 stars. Those responsible have been sacked. –ed

Something smells funny

I was going to send this to NovaLogic, but decided that their response would probably be nil, and more importantly this would be a better forum for what I have to say. This then, is an open letter to Novalogic, fat lot of good it will do, I'd still like to set the record straight.

In the November issue of *Computer Games Strategy Plus*, NovaLogic ran an ad on Page 13 for their new F-22 Raptor flight simulator. As one of the people involved in building the F-22 (and one of the people who built the YF-22 prototype), I was somewhat offended by the Skunk Works logo lurking in the background of the ad.

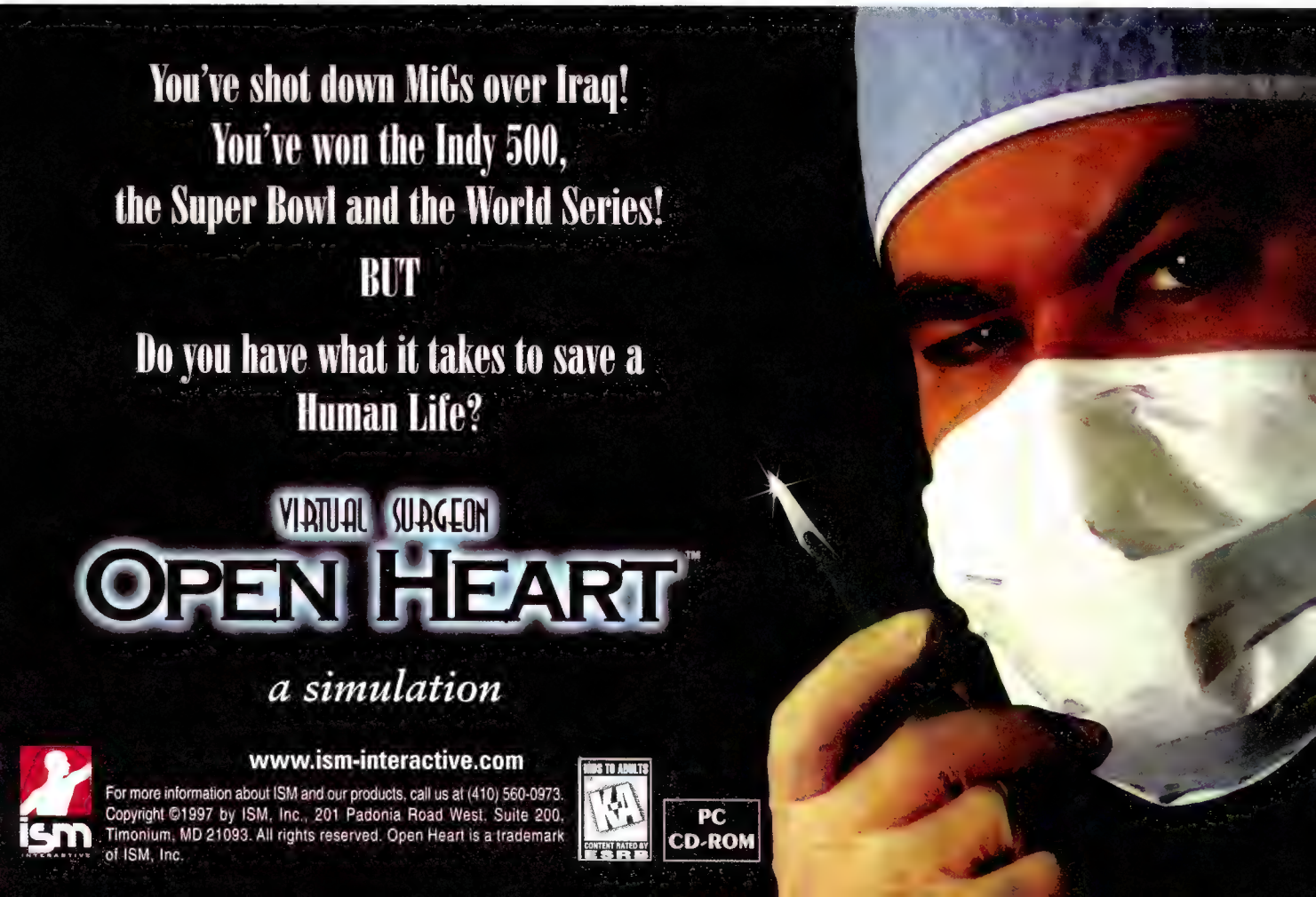
The fact is Skunk Works, in Palmdale CA, had very little to do with producing the Raptor. Most of what involvement they did have was that the Skunk Facility was used for final assembly of the prototypes. The aircraft was designed in Fort Worth, TX, which belonged to General Dynamics at the time; Seattle, WA, a Boeing facility, Marietta, GA; and to some extent at Palmdale, which is a separate unit from the Skunk Works.

Skunk Works personnel will not participate in the production phase of the program, nor are they engaged in the production test aircraft program. (Rumor has it they're too busy with Aurora).

Just because something is produced by Lockheed Martin does not make it a Skunk Works project. The F-16 is now built by Lockheed Martin, the C-130 has been in production since before most of us were born, and neither of those are Skunk Works projects.

When the Fort Worth facility was acquired by Lockheed, some of the people joked about now being the Armadillo Works. Maybe they should run that logo in the background.

Allan Vrasich
Via Internet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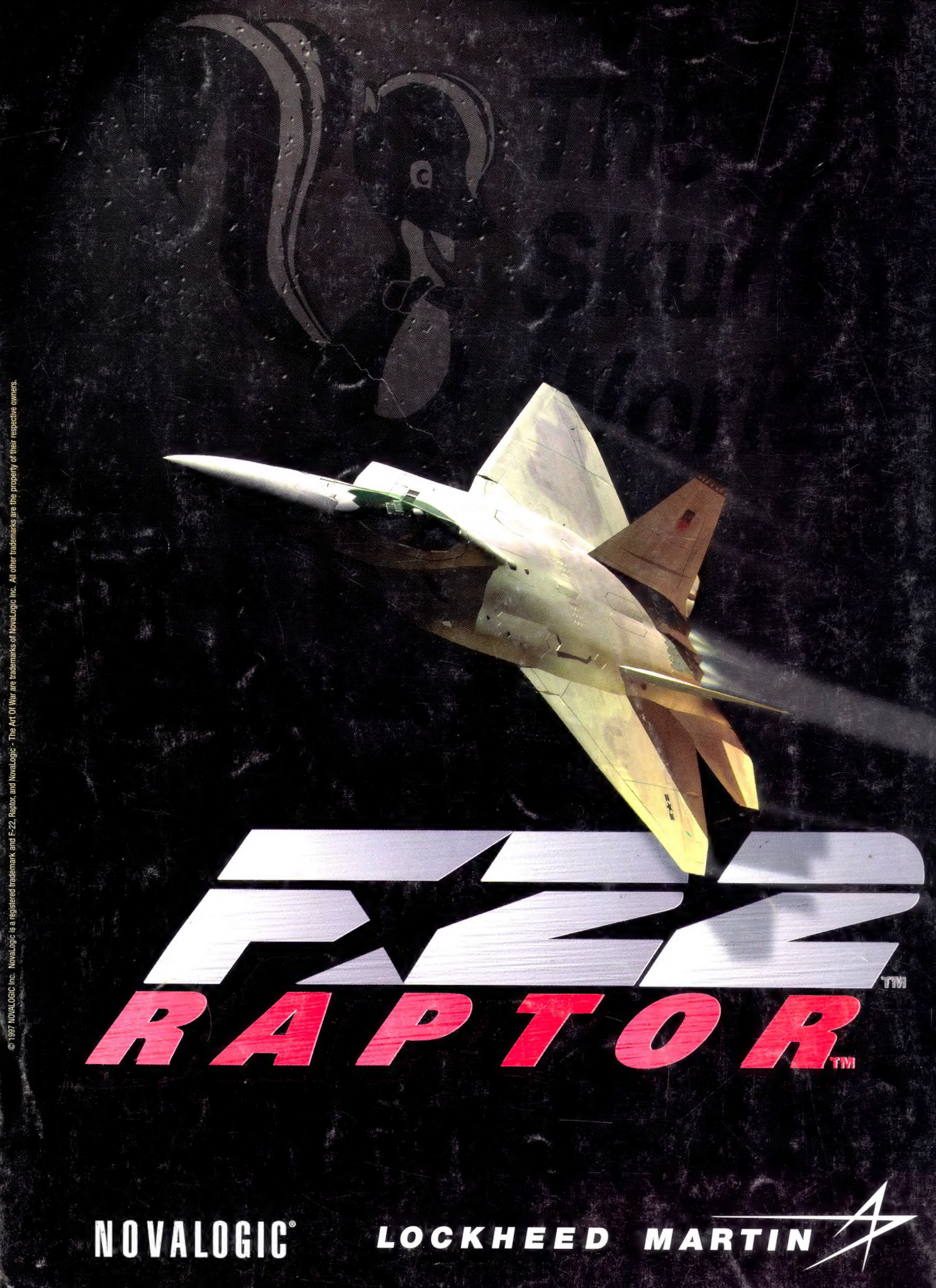

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